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THE UNDER TRAIL

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Breathing quickly, the two girls faced each other — *Frontispiece.*
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LITTLE, BROWN, AND [illegible]

THE UNDER TRAIL

BY

ANNA ALICE CHAPIN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MARTIN JUSTICE

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1912

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" . . . 'Tis pleasant to escape to greener things.
Instead of drinking from a golden thimble
Insipid sirups, slowly, drop by drop,
Shall we not let the soul allay its thirst
By drinking freely from the river's flood? "

CYRANO DE BERGERAC.

3+7/13

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THE UNDER TRAIL

CHAPTER I

A CALL TO DUTY

"On every hand the roads begin,
And people walk with zeal therein;
But wheresoe'er the highways tend,
Be sure there's nothing at the end.

Then follow you, wherever hie
The traveling mountains of the sky.

. . . . . .

And one and all go night and day
Over the hills and far away!"

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

"How is your patient, Miss Gray?" asked Craig Evarts, expressing perhaps more interest in his excellent aunt than he really felt.

Miss Gray, the trained nurse from Richmond, was an exceedingly pretty young woman, with neat blond hair, and a smooth skin, tinted with cream and roses, which her seemingly placid temperament allowed to remain untouched by fatigue or temperature. Craig's sister, Louise, insisted spitefully that the cream and roses were too good to be natural; but as it happens she was wrong. Miss Gray's complexion was all her own. She was physically of the type which a more sedative occupation might have made bovine, being large, fair, and classically curved; but when one

goes through the Johns Hopkins training school, and subsequently survives three years of "special nursing," one does not too easily acquire habits either of flesh or indolence. Miss Juliet Gray was wiry, firm-fibered, and quietly alert. Under her correct white uniform her nerves were steel and her muscles in unusual training; from beneath the trimly dressed fair hair and triangle of starched cap, her cool blue eyes looked shrewdly and not too responsively out upon the world.

Now, as her patient's nephew addressed her from the other side of the lunch table, she smiled composedly, and said: "Miss Evarts seems much better to-day. I thought I should like to go for a walk if it cleared."

She looked dubiously toward the window where the rain had drawn a gray curtain across the outlook. Louise Evarts shivered at the very thought of going out.

"These mountain storms sometimes last days," she declared. "If Aunt Alicia is well enough for you to leave her, Miss Gray, I should strongly advise you to choose a novel and a warm corner by the library fire, and stay there! You'll have it to yourself this afternoon, I fancy; I am going to lie down."

She yawned a perfunctory farewell, and strolled out of the room. Juliet looked rueful.

"I hate to lose the chance of a walk," she said. "I get so little fresh air when I am on duty, and I am so dependent on it!"

The young man looked at her admiringly.

"Yes, I should say you were by nature a real out-of-door girl," he said with warmth.

Miss Gray did not encourage that look nor that inflexion in relatives of her patients; so she rose quickly, but without any appearance of haste, and went to the window.

The Evarts house was built high on a hillside. The rain had almost blotted out the valley, and, across the way, the splendid mountain range looked pale and shadowy, with crests feathered by low-hanging clouds.

The mountain chain was near the West Virginia border, and stood like a great wall across the western side of the valley. Eastward lay a lower chain of hills, more rolling and a shade less wild, but, as a matter of fact, all the country was mountainous. The little watering place lay like an oasis of civilization between the huge, indifferent ranges. On its upper outskirts were scattered country places like Evartston, where Juliet was professionally employed, but for the most part they were of the purely cottage character. Almost directly behind them, however, pressed the primeval forests — strong and untamable, always and forever encroaching upon the feeble boundaries of cultivation set by man.

The great western range was cut into here and there by huge gorges, through which loomed still more peaks and ranges, purple with distance. And, although the crest of the chain remained nearly uniform, these gorges divided it into separate mountains, each one of which had been apportioned its name or nickname by the people who lived there.

Of all the wild hill country thereabouts, the wildest

was that portion of the range known to the neighborhood as Liberty Ridge.

"I thought," remarked the nurse discontentedly, "that Virginia was in the sunny South, and that it was never cold or disagreeable!"

Young Evarts laughed.

"Here in the mountains near the West Virginia line, you get the beastliest weather going," he said. "Especially at this season. It's a shame. I can't see why Aunt Alicia and Lulu like coming here — except," he added frankly, "that the valley crowd is supposed to be 'smart' on account of the baths."

Juliet nodded. She knew that the Evartses were understood to be social climbers. And she knew further that the Hot Sulphur Springs in the mountain fastness of Virginia had made the region something of a resort at certain seasons. The Evartses, when Miss Alicia Evarts, the rich aunt, was well, were in the habit of entertaining a good deal, and very generously. The house was large and handsome, the family a kindly, pleasant one, and they had gotten on remarkably well socially. Juliet had been nearly a month with Miss Evarts, who was recovering slowly from nervous prostration, and now, at the extreme end of her stay, she was obliged to admit to herself that the son of the house, young Craig Evarts, was falling in love with her.

She was a cool-headed young person, and she was already weighing the question of accepting him. He was a nice fellow, simple, clean living, and sufficiently

good to look at. And he had money. But Juliet Gray was a very successful nurse, and she liked her work. Moreover she dearly loved her freedom.

And then — but this was something which she would not even consider nor whisper to herself, and had never put into words — she was waiting for something. She believed, somewhere in the recesses of her mind, that something was in store for her, something not entirely in keeping with the rest of her eminently practical and commonplace existence; she did not even conjecture what it might be. She would have been ashamed to have definitely formulated this expectation, but she had it. Sometimes it puzzled her, but she usually dismissed it. It was, however, a factor in her deliberations, and influenced her in her reluctance to marry Craig Evarts, who was in all respects a good match, and whom she liked as well as any man whom she had yet met.

The instinct for keeping to generalities is the leading feminine rule of self-preservation. Acting on this, Juliet remarked quietly, as she gazed out on the rain, that bad weather always seemed particularly hard to bear in a health or pleasure resort.

"The poor souls come to be lifted out of themselves," she explained. "And the sky comes and shuts them back into themselves — hard. And then they are worse than ever. Poor creatures!"

"You are very sympathetic," said Evarts, edging closer.

She smiled merrily at him.

"Don't let Doctor Clement hear you say that," she protested. "It's a dreadful thing to say of a nurse that she is sympathetic. But" — her voice grew more serious — "my heart always aches for people who work hard to be happy. It seems so pitiful, somehow, when the very essence of happiness is that, like all good things in the world, it comes without the asking, without being prepared for — if it ever comes at all."

"But those people," suggested the young man, speaking awkwardly, for he was not at home in this sort of talk, "those — you know — who are always trying for happiness — I expect they aren't really worth it, or they would get it."

He thought vaguely of the feverish divorcees and dissipated men who came to the Springs to recuperate.

"I don't care — I want them to have their chance," said Juliet. She spoke almost fiercely. "I want every one to have a chance."

"Whether they are worthy of it or not?" he said.

"Yes," she insisted defiantly. "I believe — Oh, I can't tell you how I believe in every one — the weakest, sickest, most cowardly, most criminal thing alive getting a chance."

The telephone rang, and he excused himself, and went quickly away. He was expecting a message, he said.

Juliet was left alone. She glanced indifferently about the dining room. It was part of her profession to spend most of her life among other people's be-

longings. She was tolerant and uncritical by nature, but it occurred to her that, had she furnished the room, she would not have put a lovely Queen Anne Sheffield tea set in juxtaposition to a hideous plated kettle of new and ornate design; nor would her portières of Indian red have been so recklessly combined with a Delft-blue wall paper. These, however, were minor defects. She liked the Evartses, and was not inclined to hold them to too strict a standard of cultivated taste.

Craig Evarts was back within two minutes, laboring under the suppressed excitement inevitable to a somewhat slow-witted man when confronted with conditions that are unfamiliar.

"I say," he blurted, "there's a beastly row over at the shacks!"

"Shacks! Shacks?" queried Miss Gray.

"Why, you know — the shacks where our road makers live, over on Liberty Ridge," he elucidated, almost impatiently. "I've been opening up that tract of land running through Major's Gap — five miles beyond the railroad station. I'm making a trail up the steepest side of Purple Mountain, and I have about fifty men under overseers on the mountain side, in shacks. This weather is awfully bad for the men; they can't work, on account of the mud and slipping clay, and there's every temptation to get into mischief. Gives them time, you know, to get drunk, and get into all manner of scraps."

He looked at her apologetically. Juliet suppressed

a smile. But she was interested. "I quite understand," she said gravely. "Well?"

"Well, it seems that two of the fellows got into a row up there, and one of them is shot — rather badly, I imagine."

She gave an exclamation of horror, and started for the door, her trained professional instinct responding to the imperative call of an accident.

"I say, where are you going?" demanded the young man.

"Why, to the man who is shot, of course," she replied, as if surprised that he should ask.

"But, really," he exclaimed, "you can't go there. Oh, it's out of the question. It's —"

"Nonsense!" she said briskly. "Of course I shall go. Your aunt is well enough now to be left, and —"

"Oh, bother my aunt! At least — of course you know I don't mean that. But I was thinking of you."

"What about me? I'm considered a very good surgical nurse, young man."

"Everything is in an awful mess up there —"

"Do they know who did the shooting?"

"Yes — a fellow named Blake. He's a queer chap, by all accounts; a splendid workman, and quiet enough as a general thing, but very dangerous when he's in a rage."

"Have they got him?"

"Mack, who telephoned, was so excited I couldn't

get any particulars. Oh, I guess they've got him all right. Every one saw the shooting."

"Well, we're wasting time. I must get there at once."

"There are fifty men all more or less drunk there this minute. Why, the shot chap's drunk himself!"

"I don't care, my dear man," she said in a motherly tone, "if there are a hundred and fifty. I never noticed that men needed any the less care when they were drunk; quite the contrary."

"It isn't safe," he insisted, stepping between her and the door.

"Not safe? Rubbish! If it isn't safe, you're responsible. You shouldn't have such a lawless crowd, without proper means of looking after them. What have you done about it, anyway?"

"For one thing, I've sent for the police."

Her eyes twinkled. "The lo-cal con-stab-u-lar-y! How many police in Hot Sulphur Springs, please?"

"The sheriff is coming over from Carkham with a posse," he said, flushing.

"The sheriff!" she repeated derisively, slipping past him into the hall. "My friend, what you need at your shacks is a doctor."

"I'll send for my motor first of all," exclaimed Evarts, impetuously, springing for the telephone. "By Jove, you're a brick! Hello, there! Give me my garage. Yes, my garage, and be quick about it — it's a matter of life and death."

Juliet went upstairs immediately, roused Louise

from her nap, and explained the situation. That young lady was too consumed with amazement at Miss Gray's temerity in going to the scene of the crime to do anything more than gape at her. A word to Juliet's patient was sufficient. Miss Evarts was nervous, but in no sense silly. She thought her nurse quite right in going, and offered to contribute everything in the house from her listerine to her fur coat.

"And I do hope the poor man that did it will get off," was her last astonishing remark. Juliet burst out laughing, and went to hunt up antiseptics.

When Craig Evarts hurried down, five minutes after the time of his telephone message, he found the motor snorting at the door, and Miss Gray bundled up in a waterproof cloak with a voluminous hood, calmly checking off the contents of her pocket hypodermic case. She looked up with her steady, cheerful smile.

"Ready, you see. Nitroglycerin, strychnine, morphia, atropine — Yes, everything, I think, that will be necessary. Mr. Evarts, will you take that little bag on the hall table? It has the surgical gauze and the bichloride. I'll put the hypodermic in the pocket of the cape. Are you going to drive or is your chauffeur?"

"I am."

"I don't wonder. What a dear car it is!"

She jumped into the machine, and took her place in front next to the driver's seat. "I do wish," she sighed regretfully, "that I had a green-soap solution."

When Evarts sprang in beside her and took the wheel, he was still smiling.

"You can't have an up-to-date asceptic operating room, you know," he remonstrated. "Probably the poor chap won't be alive by the time we get there, anyway."

"Well, we shall know that we have done our best. And then," she added, "we shall have had a pleasant motor trip."

"Pleasant!" He swung the car through the gate-posts into the steep road leading to the valley. It was a running river of liquid-red mud and the machine skidded badly. It was built for touring, and had heavy side curtains and a protecting glass in front, but the rain drove in upon them like the playing of a giant hose. "If this is your idea of a pleasure trip — See here, I was an ass not to put you in the back."

"I'd rather be here with you," she said, not sentimentally, just with the simplest friendliness. Evarts flushed darkly, and stole a glance at her. Never, he swore to himself, had he seen a girl that could touch her for a moment!

"You look ripping, you know!" was his response to her kind little compliment.

"I must, in this brown mackintosh thing!"

The rain had wet even her eyelashes; her face, fresh and rosy, shone with it. Louise would have had to reconsider her suspicions as to the complexion.

"Can't you fasten that hood down closer?" he suggested. "Your cap won't look a bit professional when we get there!"

"My cap!" she repeated, putting her hand up in dismay. "Have I my cap on? How utterly silly! I forgot all about it."

"I wondered if you considered it indispensable —"

She bubbled with laughter. "Well, never mind! Perhaps it will awe your ruffians and desperadoes up there. Oh, do we go this way?" as they wheeled down the gap into the Carkham high road.

"Yes. It's longer, but the road's better. As it is, we'll have a ticklish bit — a mile or two at the end."

"What class of men are your road-making workmen?" she asked. "White or colored?"

"White, this lot. I've a larger gang of negroes digging and breaking ground down the gap. Up where this thing happened, the work is finer — grading and all that."

"And these two who fought?"

She could see him shrug under his rubber coat. "I don't know much about either of them. Blake is a stranger to the neighborhood — rather an adventurous free lance evidently. Mooney, the chap who was shot, lives somewhere around here when he isn't drunk or working. I suppose the row was about Mooney's best girl. I've heard she was of the siren order, and Blake is something of a ladies' man."

They plunged on through the rain, lurching over fresh-washed gullies in the road, and swerving rakishly as they slid around corners. Evarts was not a reckless driver, but he knew that there was need of speed, not only on account of the wounded man, but also because of the increasing intensity of the storm. He was anxious, since the thing had to be done, to reach their destination while the new road up the mountain was still passable. Besides, he liked to show off his car and his driving to Miss Gray.

Those who are familiar with this region know that it is a world apart. It is a storybook land. In the old villages and weather-silvered homesteads, quaint romances seem still lived as they used to be, "befo' de war." Fading softly with the brocaded chairs and the rose leaves they use for potpourri, the archaic, gracious life of the old South lingers still in these Virginia valleys. In the mountain gorges, or, as they call them there, "gaps," such pictures of exquisite wild beauty meet the eye as make the most prosaic wish to write poetry and dream dreams. There are cataracts that foam thunderously from rocky ledges; shady hollows and dense bits of satyr-haunted wood; and sudden sweeping glimpses of bright, open country and a long, undulating mountain chain, reaching high along the sky.

Are not all these veritable poems, spelled in the rich phraseology of nature? Here, too, are the caverns and subterranean passageways, the boiling hot springs and bottomless fissures that seem like

the phenomena evoked by some colossal magician, things dreadful and full of wonder. And for the rest, scattered thick through these wild, strange hills, live folk of varying callings and characters, but of unfailing picturesqueness: the sand diggers, the moonshiners — their specialty is applejack — negro voodoo doctors, and some of the most habitually lawless individuals in the country, some of them frank enemies to society, and others dwelling prosperously and brazenly in the very shadow of the strong arm of justice.

Perhaps the same thought occurred to each of the two who drove so hard through the storm that September afternoon. If it were murder that awaited their arrival, what setting more fitting could there be for the uncivilized deed than this land of lowering mountains, themselves eternally uncivilized, eternally pitted against the taming, commonizing influence of man?

They whirred on through the driving rain and gathering duskiness. The clouds shut out the daylight more and more, and were already anticipating the real dark. Soon they had left behind the last of the cottages and villas that marked the colony of the Springs.

After twice finding the roads impassable and having to go by a longer and more roundabout way, they finally began to ascend slowly, by a primitive and rocky road. Down to the left, Juliet saw the switchback a mile or more below the railway station,

and realized that they were now well above the region with which her drives with Miss Evarts had made her familiar. So heavily were the clouds settling down that shortly the gorge beneath them was only an abyss, violet blue and infinitely mysterious.

"Are we on the new road yet?"

"Not my new road; though this is comparatively recent — for Virginia, that is, where they go and have a drink after breaking each stone. It's the end of this that I've been trying to open up. I'm carrying it up over the pass, which is the most beautiful thing as to view in the country, and down on the other side. It's a lovely job!"

It seemed to Juliet a bewilderingly long and a bewilderingly rough trip before, well on in the afternoon, they came in sight of the foreman's shack. It was a lonely little shanty, perched above them on the brow of a hill. Between stretched the fresh, soft, soggy mud of the new road. It was, to say the least, not quite ready for automobiling, and Evarts looked up it in despair.

"There's no use our trying to make that," he said hopelessly.

But it seemed to Juliet Gray that to have that long, uncomfortable trip come to nothing would be more than she could bear. Not only did her professional spirit yearn toward the surgical case up there somewhere on the mountain, but she felt an additional and unwonted zest in the adventure.

"Pouf! There's a man dying up there probably. What's a little bit of bad road?"

"A little bit!"

"How far away are the men's shacks?"

"Half — maybe a mile beyond Mack's. It's no use."

"Is the grade so bad?"

"No. The grade's all right. If it weren't for the mud, she'd carry it like a bird." He always spoke of the big car as though it were some cherished racing mare.

"I thought she was particularly strong on mud!" said the girl, with intentional malice.

He almost scowled at her. "She is. But I'm not particularly strong on having us both pitched off the cliff. It's a new road and fearfully soft; any minute the side of the hill might give way."

"What a badly made road!" said Miss Gray.

A pause. "I suppose you are afraid of hurting your car."

Evarts set his teeth.

"All right!" he said. "If you like taking chances like this, I'm willing enough."

He jammed down his lever hard.

"I don't believe she can do it," sighed Juliet sweetly.

"She can *do* it, all right."

She laughed inwardly, as he urged the big car forward. His face had a youthfully obstinate look; he *was* a boy!

They leaped, splashing and grunting, along the first steep stretch of the way. Then they turned a dizzy corner, sank, recovered themselves, had a vision of a startling abyss at their left, and — suddenly pitched sideways slowly down a short embankment, into a giant puddle of dark-yellow mud.

CHAPTER II

ON THE TRAIL

> ". . . Through the rocks we wound:
> The great pine shook with lonely sounds of joy.
> . . . . As mountain streams
> Our bloods run free. . . .
> We often paused, and, looking back, we saw
> The clefts and openings in the mountains fill'd
> With the blue Valley. . . ."
>
> ALFRED TENNYSON.

THE next thing that Juliet was conscious of was her pervading sense of this yellow mud. She could see, feel, and smell nothing but mud. As her head cleared, she realized that she was sitting in it, which partly explained the effect.

Across a waste of mud, she saw Evarts disentangling himself from the overturned car. Incidentally he and his beloved machine were as muddy as she was, which was reassuring.

Neither man nor girl appeared to be hurt. She sat up feebly, and he splashed anxiously over to her.

"All right?" he called.

"A-all right!" Her voice was shaky, but courageous.

"Sure you're all right?" he repeated, as he approached. "Lord, that was some tumble!"

He grinned muddily down at her. She saw relieved tenderness written large in his eyes.

"Well!" said Juliet, breathless, but still spirited. "She *couldn't* do it, anyway!"

He laughed, and helped her solicitously to her feet. Thanks to her enveloping mackintosh, her libations of mud were only on the outside. She dreaded, however, to look at the hem of her white uniform skirt!

"Well," he said in a different tone, "I'm pretty glad, thank you, that it was no worse. Want some brandy or anything? I've a flask."

She shook her head. She felt bruised, but otherwise quite normal. "What happened exactly?"

"Just what I thought might happen. The edge of the road went up in smoke — or rather mud — and we got ourselves tipped over into this nice little nest, on a shelf, you see, about six feet down. With just a bit more velocity, it might have been sixty — but it wasn't. No, don't look," he added quickly, as she turned to glance downward.

"I am never dizzy," she told him. It did look a long way down. The bank seemed to have been cut off sharp, and beneath it was — nothing. And they had escaped — *that* by about a yard! She shivered, not with fear, but with a realizing sense of what we mean by fate.

"I suppose you might call it a narrow escape," she

said. "I wonder" — she spoke as though in a dream — "I wonder what — I — was saved for? Was your car hurt, Mr. Evarts?"

"A bit, probably. I'll have to get hold of Mack, and see what we can do with it, after I — I —" He hesitated.

"After you decide what to do with me! Well, luckily, I've decided that myself, Mr. Evarts. Can we get up that precipice? Oh, yes, I see. Thanks! Very easy, indeed! What a silly thing to fall down, especially for a motor car; she must be humiliated. Now, I take it that a few minutes' walk will bring me to your foreman's house?"

"Yes. But look here. I believe that's Mack now."

A short, stout man was running down the road. It proved indeed to be good little "Scotch" Mackanerny, in much consternation over the chapter of mishaps which had befallen him.

"The young leddy? Oh, yes, a nurse, to be sure! But the puir lad is beyond needin' one, it seems. Na, na, not deid, on'y vera bad. Shot — just above his middle somewheres. A bad thing, a vera bad thing. Blake — may God forgi'e him! — Blake got awa' — Oh, ye may swear, Meester Evarts; 'twasna my fault. Yes; he's awa' —Na, na! He couldna ha' gotten far. But these lads liked him, d'ye see, and they're banded together to gi'e him what they call fair play!"

"I like that," said mud-spattered Juliet, warmly.

Mackanerny regarded her with a cold and a mournfully distrustful eye.

"Do ye indeed, miss? Weel, I'm not likin' it so much. He is a terrible mon to be at lar-rge, though I'm not sayin' the lad hasna his guid points! And 'twas all because of a little baggage wi' black eyes — Dan Turley's lass, that flirts wi' every lad in the county."

The crippled motor car filled him with a fluttering dismay and bewilderment. In the disciplining of men and the grading of roads as per directions, Mackanerny was admirable, but to him an automobile was a mysterious and not entirely holy phenomenon of nature.

Both men agreed that Miss Gray was to go to Mack's shanty and wait for them there.

"And, of course," Evarts said with authority, "you will not think of trying to hunt up your patient till we come for you."

She looked so sweetly submissive that no one could have doubted her obedient intentions. They decided after consultation to allow her to walk alone up the short remaining distance to Mack's. They would see to the motor, and follow on at once.

Juliet Gray had learned that if you do not agree with a man as to a course of action, you must never discuss it. If you don't care very much about it, do as he wishes, and say nothing; if you do care very much, do as you choose, and still say nothing. So she smiled amiably, and said that she thought that a

very sensible arrangement. Then she nodded a meekly cheerful good-by, and trudged off in the rain in the direction of Mack's cottage.

Of course she had not the slightest intention of waiting in Mackanerny's. She had a patient somewhere up there on the gray hillside; if she only followed this road, it would take her to him. She knew that the ruder shacks which housed the men were within walking distance, so she passed the foreman's cottage, and started on her journey upward without a qualm of misgiving. She had never been afraid in her life, and her duty had taken her into strange places and among strange people. She was strong, and dressed lightly enough for walking, and she had a thoroughgoing contempt for the inconveniences of the elements. On the whole, had it not been for her slight bruises and stiffness from her spill, she would have enjoyed her tramp up the mountain that wild fall afternoon.

It appeared to be getting rather late, by the bye, — how late she could only conjecture vaguely, but the artificial darkness of the iron-gray rain clouds had begun to melt unmistakably into twilight shadows. The wind that swept up the gorge had a sharper edge and a drearier note. The early autumn evening was closing in upon the mountains.

The downpour of rain, the ceaseless rush of wind, and the gathering darkness, combined to bewilder Juliet's faculties. She felt hypnotized by the monotonous violence, which enveloped her. She began to

Suddenly she saw in front of her a man standing motionless — *Page 23.*

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be physically fatigued and mentally, strangely oppressed.

Never had she experienced so strange a sensation. If she had been walking in a bewitched labyrinth, she could hardly have felt more helpless. The way seemed astonishingly, disproportionately long; she stumbled from weariness. She wondered vaguely whether she could have taken a wrong turning. She knew nothing of exact directions, but had assumed that to reach the workmen's shacks she had only to follow the road straight up. Was that, after all, what she had done? She was not on anything resembling a road now. The way was steep and narrow; straggling dwarfish trees and brambly undergrowth shut out the misty gorge. When had she turned from the wider road? She felt confused; she had no recollection of having made any turning at all.

The path by which she was now climbing in the driving rain was unutterably wild and desolate. A heaviness of spirit, which she knew was partly physical, gripped the girl's heart. In that lonely, storm-swept land of the mountains, she seemed the only living thing — a tired, clambering pygmy, lost among the eternal hills.

Suddenly she saw in front of her, about ten feet up the path, a man, standing motionless. At first she thought it was an hallucination, he stood so still, and looked so gray and indistinct in the rain and shadows. Then he moved sharply back, a lithe, furtive movement full of life, and she knew that he was real.

For a second it seemed as though he were going to dash into the bushes like some startled animal — not as a hare or deer runs, in the terror of weakness, but with the imperious shyness of some wilder, stronger thing, eluding human trespass upon its solitudes. Then the tense lines of the tall body seemed to relax, and with a steady, swinging tread, the man came slowly toward her.

He was a big man, thin, but built on a giant's scale, with a great, sparsely fleshed bony structure that promised extraordinary power. His skin, rough, hard, and seasoned, covered splendid details of modeling — a broad brow, square, cleanly carved jaws, and a nose as straight as any cut by Praxiteles. Hair and mustache were black and thick and unkempt. His eyes were black, too, as she saw when he came closer, and of the singularly inscrutable quality shared by most very dark eyes. You could look at them, you could look into them as you look into an inky pool, but you could never look through them to the soul beyond.

His flannel shirt was gray, and the coarse trousers tucked into his high rubber boots were gray, and also his slouch hat. Everything about him blended with the gray day.

Juliet felt some odd sense of familiarity with the man, but she knew it to be a familiarity of the spirit. She had never seen him before. She noticed that his heavy eyebrows were set slanting, and that there was a whimsical crookedness about one corner of his

mouth under the dark mustache. He was like a giant faun in his physical make-up. Rough and saturnine, he nevertheless possessed some quality not easily put into words, but more easily felt than many more definite attributes — Miss Gray knew a good deal about animal magnetism.

"You're some points out of your way, aren't you?" he said. His voice was slow and deep, with a ring in it that touched hidden cords in many hearts — especially women's.

"Well," said Juliet, vaguely and a shade breathlessly, "that would depend on what my way was, wouldn't it?"

The stranger smiled, and showed healthy white teeth. His slanted eyebrows slanted even more quaintly, and the corners of his lips went higher. But his eyes did not smile; they remained inscrutable, almost opaque with mystery.

"You're out of it, anyhow," he remarked. "This particular coon track doesn't lead anywhere — particularly."

There was a barely perceptible hesitation before the last word.

"But where does it lead?" demanded Juliet, who was direct and persistent.

The man glanced at her, and then up at the frowning heavens, as he answered indifferently: "Chap named Turley lives up there a piece. No one else that I ever heard of."

"Turley!" she repeated. "Why, that's the name

of the girl who —" She checked herself. The stranger was regarding her with surprising intentness.

"Well?" he drawled.

"Nothing. I had heard the name, that's all." And as her mind leaped to the more important point, she added: "Then, of course, I *am* out of my way!"

"What was it?" He was laconic.

"My way? I wanted to get to the shack where the wounded man is — that is, unless he is dead by now, poor creature!"

"What wounded man?" he demanded, with a quicker glance.

"The workman who was shot. Do you know anything about him?"

"A little."

She wondered why his tone sounded faintly ironic. Otherwise he expressed no emotion whatever. After this brief remark, he was silent for some small space. Then he gave Juliet a queer, steady, appraising look. He surveyed her quietly, and not at all insolently, from the top of her head to the tips of her muddy shoes. Then his gaze came back to her eyes, and he looked at her squarely for a full minute. He glanced about him — up to the dark sky, right and left over the lonely mountain side, and he drew one long, deep breath. She saw him shake his big shoulders in an odd way, as though he shrugged from him some last uncertainty or indecision.

"Right," he said shortly. "Come with me. I'll take you to the man you're looking for."

He led the way down the path by which she had come. At first he strode ahead, but after a minute he paused, and let her come abreast of him.

"Do you want a hand, ma'am?"

"No, thanks. I'm doing very well."

There was another short pause, and then he said: "If it isn't asking too much, what do you want with Nat Mooney?"

"I want to take care of him — if he's alive."

"You want to take *care* of him!"

"Yes; I'm a nurse."

He glanced at her with kindling interest. "You are! A trained nurse, do you mean, from a hospital?"

"Yes, of course."

He was still for a moment. Then she heard him chuckle. It seemed rather inopportune, and she was jarred.

"What is there so funny about it?" she demanded.

"Nothing. I guess there's nothing funny at all about being a nurse. Only it struck me as rather gilt-edged for Nat Mooney to have a trained nurse. Ever see him?"

"No."

He chuckled again. To her own rage, she discovered that it jarred less the second time. This little laugh of his, almost noiseless and a trifle cynical, had nevertheless an infectious quality, which probably was part of the man's compelling personality.

"You are very unsympathetic," she said coldly.

"No?" said he, with one slanting eyebrow lifted

higher than the other. "Now, there's lots of people find me just the other way. Look out for that stump there, ma'am!"

They went on for a minute or two. Then he turned to her again. "Do you mind a little rough going?"

She shook her head.

"Then here's where we'll take a short cut."

He turned from the path, and plunged into the wet woods. She followed promptly, holding up an arm to shield her eyes from the recoil of the interlaced branches and creepers. After a time she noticed that he was quietly protecting her from them himself. Once he halted, and put out a quick hand to stop her from stumbling when there was a sudden slippery dip in the ground. Several times he rolled stones out of the way, and lifted heavy logs into the bushes. He did not speak again, nor look once in her direction, but, in a casual but definite fashion of his own, he took care of her.

Juliet had a curious sense of friendliness and comradeship with this rough, unknown man of the woods. Sex was not yet consciously awake between them, but in some essentials of personality, some quality of fearlessness and strength of heart, some oddly self-controlled recklessness of consequences, some subtle freedom of the spirit, they were mates. It was a keen and living experience to the girl, this tramping with him through the drenched and windy mountain woods. Whatever the result of her mission of mercy might be, Juliet was glad that she had come.

Suddenly they came out into the open and their faces were clear of brushing leaves. They were evidently back on the new road again — it was the same wet yellow clay, Juliet saw — but much higher up the mountain than where she had left it. Major's Gap, with its opposite mountain crest, spread even more vaguely in the dimness. The other mountain seemed now to be beneath them. And just in front of them was a shack, rude and primitive, obviously built for only temporary use. A dim light showed at one of the shut windows. With a shock, Juliet realized that it was dark enough by this time to make a lamp necessary.

"Here we are," said the man, briefly. He strode to the door, but before he opened it he seemed to hesitate. It was quite odd the way he raised his hand to the latch and dropped it again. Juliet was puzzled, because she knew that he was not afraid.

At last he flung the door, suddenly and almost violently, and stood aside for her to enter, saying: "Better hurry. This wind'll blow out the whole inside of the house!"

Juliet went in without a word, and he followed her, closing the door against the storm outside, which seemed, as it was shut out, to lift its voice and howl like a cheated wolf.

CHAPTER III

A SURGICAL CASE

> ". . . If in that bright disguise
> Thou visit earth, a daughter of the skies,
> Hail, Dian, hail! the huntress of the groves
> So shines majestic, and so stately moves,
> So breathes an air divine! . . ."
>
> POPE'S *Odyssey.*

THE shack was low and dark and rather close. The walls were lined with bunks, one above the other, like berths on shipboard. A single oil lamp, smelling foully of kerosene and guttering in every puff of air when some one moved, stood on the table.

In one of the lower bunks lay a big heavily built man, very still. On the rough gray blanket beneath him was a dark wine-colored shadow that, as one looked, appeared to be very slowly spreading. The scene seemed to Juliet Gray inexpressibly strange and sinister and quite unreal.

A small, thin, sandy-tinted man leaped up from a seat in the corner, and stood staring, as though he could not believe his eyes. Except for him, and the grim figure in the bunk, the room was empty.

"Derry!" cried the small, sandy man.

"Sure!" said Juliet's companion calmly, even nonchalantly. "How's Nat?"

"Derry!" the other cried again. "Be you plumb crazy?"

"Why? Do I look it? Seems to me you're doing the crazy act for both of us!" He laughed softly and easily. "Sit down, Ed, and behave peaceful, even if you don't feel it."

"Derry — he's going to die!"

The big man nodded his head slowly.

"Well, I was afraid of it," he remarked. "Too bad!"

"I guess you'll think it's too bad," began the small man, explosively, "when you're —"

"Oh, take a book and read," said his friend, with weary gentleness.

The small, sandy man subsided into his chair, but still stared anxiously at the big man. The latter did not seem particularly affected by his rather tempestuous greeting. He took off his slouch hat, and flung it, dripping, on to the table. Juliet saw that his head was well shaped, well set, and well carried. He was much handsomer without his hat than with it. He became, too, less spectacular, less impersonally scenic; one thought of him less as a picturesque adjunct to a romantic atmosphere, and more as a human man, a possible friend.

He turned to her with one of the lithe motions which she had learned were really very swift, though so easily made that they seemed slow.

"Now, ma'am," he said, "let's have that mackintosh or whatever it is."

"Say," blurted the little man in the chair irrepressibly, "who's the girl?"

"Shut up," said the big man, not at all unpleasantly. And he took Juliet's cloak.

When that capacious and unæsthetic garment — fashioned to extinguish individuality and discount good looks — had been dispensed with, both men were a bit startled by the picture they had. A little mud at the bottom of her piqué skirt, a little limpness about the cap which was meant to be crisp, and a little — a very little — damp disorder in the smooth, soft ripple of blond hair that framed her face — these were the only defects. For the rest, Juliet was fresh and fair, white of skin as of gown, clear-eyed, nobly built, steady and sweet and sound. Into that squalid, dingy little room she brought a breath of real beauty — beauty of the cleanest and sanest type. Never in her life had Juliet Gray looked half so well, or made so complete an impression.

For herself, she was contained and professional. "Is this the best light I can get?" she asked in a direct way.

"We have — I mean, there's another lamp, isn't there, Ed?" said the man called Derry.

The sandy-haired individual looked dubious. "It hasn't any chimney," he said.

Juliet walked over to the bunk where the wounded workman was lying, deeply unconscious and breathing heavily. He was a big, white, overfleshed man, who might be florid in the full tide of health. Now his

pallor was waxen under his tan, and the bloodless face looked puffy, and unwholesome in the lamplight. He was a fellow of coarse and primitive good looks, but he had a weak, gross mouth, and a badly shaped head covered with stiff yellow hair. To the nurse, all patients are cases rather than persons, yet her instinct found him indefinably repulsive, even while she cast about dispassionately for the best way to help him.

Juliet's first brief examination of Nat Mooney was watched in dead silence and attention by the two men. "He is very seriously hurt," she said at last. "I must probe for the bullet — unless there is a chance of the doctor's coming within an hour or two?"

"If he gets here to-night, he'll be doin' well," said Ed. The other said nothing.

"The wound must be disinfected, and the man should have restoratives." She went back to the wet cloak, and ascertained that she still had her hypodermic needle and little case of bottles. "Can one of you go down the road and look for my bag?" she demanded. "It's in, or under, the overturned motor car just below the foreman's."

They both looked frankly surprised. "Bag?" sputtered the little man, "What bag? Lord! You don't expect —"

"It's a bad night, ma'am," Derry reminded her quietly. "Is the bag very important?"

"It's my bag of antiseptic dressings. Of course it's important."

"Mighty unlikely to find it now, ma'am."

"And are you both afraid to try?" she flashed. "This man needs surgical aid, and I can't give it to him without disinfectants — at least, I ought not to give it to him without them. I don't want to leave him now," she added with imperious scorn, "or I should get it myself."

"Jehosaphat!" ejaculated the little man, staring. "Anybody'd think 'twas round the corner, 'stead of a mile down the road in the worst storm of the season."

"Well?" said Juliet, coldly.

"I'll get it, ma'am," said Derry, simply.

He picked up the wet slouch hat.

"Holy cats!" gasped Ed. "You ain't —"

Juliet hesitated and frowned. "Let *him* go," she said, pointing to Ed. "I need you here."

To her surprise, Derry flushed slowly. "All right," he said almost roughly. "Then I'll stay. Run along, Ed."

"Derry!" whined the smaller one. "You ain't goin' to make me go all the way down to Mack's chasin' a measly little bag of truck, just 'cause a girl —"

"Run along, Ed," the other interrupted, a shade more sternly.

"Rotten way to treat a feller," complained Ed, who looked as if he were going to cry without delay. "A night like this, and all for the sake of a rat like Nat Mooney who you —"

"*Run along, Ed!*" This time the tone was so

startlingly urgent that the victim forbore further protest, but fled with speed.

"It's only a chance, ma'am, that he'll find it, you know," said Derry. "I reckon if you've anything you can do for Nat, you'd better do it without waiting for your surgical outfit, or whatever it is."

In spite of the soft irony of his voice, Juliet looked at him with straightforward appreciation. "Thank you for staying," she said in her clear voice. "I want some one here whom I can depend on."

The man turned away, and busied himself with the lamp. She could not see his face.

As though in a dream, Juliet went to work. With the man's help, she trimmed the wick and washed the chimney, and arranged a battered tin can as a reflector. The other chimneyless lamp they turned into an alfresco heater, and with some rusty wire improvised a support to hold a small saucepan. Some shelves on the far side of the partition of the bunk house supplied salt for a saline solution, and they boiled water over the guttering and ill-smelling lamp flame. The wounded man's kit yielded a clean coarse shirt which, under Juliet's directions, Derry tore into strips for bandages. She was obliged to take the chance of using them unsterilized.

They worked together swiftly, carefully, with perfect mutual responsiveness and comprehension. Juliet felt a strange stimulation in his presence, and in his respect for and coöperation with her training and skill. And no hospital interne ever obeyed orders more

promptly and intelligently. Some force in him recognized a kindred quality in her and appreciated it. She knew this subconsciously, even when she was most earnestly absorbed in her self-imposed duties.

Nat Mooney was seriously hurt — probably, almost certainly, mortally so.

The bullet had passed through the left breast, and lodged perilously near both heart and lung. Juliet knew that it should be probed for and extracted, and that a surgeon's nerve and dexterity were needed. But the storm was increasing, instead of subsiding, and it seemed most unlikely that a doctor could reach them for many hours. She decided, with a rush of determination, to take the responsibility, and attempt the operation herself.

"I'm going to extract that bullet," she told her assistant briefly.

"Can you do it?" he asked as briefly.

"I can try. I shall want a basin of the solution and —" She gave him quick, incisive commands, and he carried them out like clockwork. The thought flitted fugitively across her brain that such deftness and speed were unusual in a man so strong and seemingly so rude of type. She inserted her hypodermic needle in the patient's forearm, and, glancing up, saw Derry looking at her oddly.

"What is it?" she said.

"Nothing." He shook his head. "I'll tell you some time — perhaps. Is this what you want?"

A minute later, Juliet lifted her head quickly.

"Listen!" she said.

She saw Derry start violently. Then the big muscles seemed to relax into controlled quiet, and the lids dropped inscrutably over the dark eyes. Whatever his mental strait, he remained unbetrayed.

But there were steps outside merged with the wild noise of the tempest — steps that were impatient, insistent with something that might be fear. Some one was fumbling with the latch. For some reason, Juliet felt apprehensive. She found herself looking questioningly at her companion. The moment seemed to hang fire for an eternity; she seemed to have been living this scene for years, this strange, grim surgeon's work, in the darkness and storm of Liberty Ridge, with the man beside her, and the wounded body on the bunk before her.

Suddenly, even as that unknown hand fumbled at the door, Derry smiled — reassuringly, warmly, intimately even. "It'll be all right," he told her.

The door was flung open by a force well-nigh as tempestuous as the gale itself. To Juliet's astonishment, it was a woman who, disheveled and panting, rushed headlong into the shack.

"Derry — Derry!" she gasped, with a rich Southern slur in her words. "Ed said you were still here — he said you hadn't gone — Oh, Derry, have you gone crazy?"

"Hush!" said Derry. "You aren't allowed in here just now, Kitty. Run along!"

There was a note, kind, careless, and proprietary in

his voice, which struck Juliet sharply. Just so might a man speak to a willful child, a dog, or a slave, to something which was essentially his own, and for which he felt a passing fondness, without valuing it extravagantly.

The girl to whom he spoke stamped her foot angrily, but obviously the anger was not at his tone, nor its assumption.

"Not allowed! And who won't allow me?"

"I won't," said Juliet, clearly, speaking for the first time. "I do not know who you are, but it makes not the slightest difference. You can't stay here. This is a sick room, and I am the nurse in charge. You are very noisy. Please go."

"You are in charge?" repeated the girl, not rudely, but simply failing to understand. "And what is *he* doing here?" She pointed to Derry.

"He's helping me," said Juliet, brusquely.

The girl laughed aloud — not unmusically, but with a veiled note of fury. Once more Derry said imperturbably: "Run along, Kitty; you're in the way."

"I won't," she said sharply. "Derry, if there's any running to be done, you —"

"Who is this person?" demanded Juliet, coldly.

"It's Kitty Turley," said the man.

Juliet felt a start of curiosity as she turned and looked full at the girl because of whom her patient had been shot. Kitty Turley was a surprise. One might have expected a full-blown, rudely buxom

maiden, the mountain belle which tradition has made typical. But one would not have found that ruddy blossom in Dan Turley's strange young daughter, the Much Desired of Liberty Ridge. Kitty was the most beautiful young creature that Juliet had ever seen. Small and slender, but compacted all of melting, curved lines, she suggested some soft, lithe little animal, but from her faintly blooming dark face gazed out a pair of big, brown eyes, so infinitely, tragically sorrowful that one's heart swelled to look into them.

Have you ever seen a small, black kitten, sitting by itself, staring into space with round, unfathomable eyes, in which seemed ever smoldering a vision of the eternal desert and the mysterious Sphinx? Kitty was that small, black kitten; her eyes were just as inscrutable and mystical and wise and the brain behind them was just about as large as the kitten's.

She wore to-night a thin blouse and skirt that clung to her body like a bathing suit. She had no wrap of any kind; she was drenched to the skin, and her inky hair hung in heavy wet loops and masses about her lovely, stormy little face. Juliet had the generous woman's love for beauty, and she had a sudden, almost maternal gush of impulsive feeling, on looking at the exquisite, violent child.

"You came because you were anxious about the poor man?" she said gently.

"Him?" said the girl, staring with indifferent curiosity at the still figure in the bunk. "Why

should I care what happens to *him?* Oh, Derry, Derry!" She thrust out her small brown hands toward him; her mellow voice was poignant with appeal. "Derry," she prayed, "you're mad, dear — you're sick mad to stay here. They'll come any minute, honey — they'll come and find you here. Derry, you'll go, won't you? You'll go — to please me — to please Kitty? Derry! To please your kitten. Derry!"

Juliet colored. She felt vaguely that this pleading, wooing intonation was too intimate for her ears.

The man seemed unmoved.

"You're wet through, Kitty," he remarked. "Go home and get dry."

"Derry," the girl cried again. "What is it — what *is* it you're doing here?"

"I've got some water to boil," said Derry, calmly, "and some salt to measure out, and some more bandages to make, and —"

"Derry! You're doing that for *him?*"

The man's eyes strayed to Juliet, rigid in her white gown and cap. He did not answer.

Kitty shrank against the wall near the door.

"Oh!" she breathed. Her eyes were deep and ominous. "I understand!" And again, more definitely: "I understand! And you're going to stay?"

"Yes, Kitty," he returned very simply. "I'm going to stay."

As swiftly, as violently as she had come, the girl flung herself through the door into the black storm

outside. Juliet thought that she heard her sobbing as she went.

"What did she mean?" Juliet asked the man, meeting his eyes squarely.

His answer was disconcerting. "The water is boiling, ma'am," he said.

Juliet set her lips, and turned again to the bunk and her work.

CHAPTER IV

MAN AND WOMAN

"And this I know: whether the one True Light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath-consume me quite,
One flash of it within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright. . . ."

OMAR KHAYYAM.

"THAT door is banging," said Juliet. As it swung inward, the wind brought the echo of a second step.

"Some one else is coming," she said.

"Liberty Ridge is a regular thoroughfare to-night," commented her companion, laconically, but with narrowing black eyes.

It was only little Ed who entered, battered and beaten by the storm, hanging limply from the latch of the swinging door.

"There a big washout!" he gasped. "The new road's gone down in soup — the side of the mountain's nothin' but a toboggan slide!"

"How about a foothold for horses?" demanded Derry, sharply.

Ed shook his wet red head.

"Not a dog's chance for 'em."

"Then the Carkham gang will have to go round?"

"All the way round. Up t'other side of the Ridge, an' down past Turley's."

"Oh!" exclaimed Juliet, involuntarily. "Then the doctor can't get here?"

The two men looked at each other, and then at her. Derry drew a long, deep breath, and then he smiled.

"No, ma'am," he said gently. "The — doctor — can't get here."

"Gee!" said Ed, spitting rain out of his mouth, "I never heard him called that before!"

"Suppose you clear out, and go on up to the other bunk house," suggested Derry, interrupting him. Was he afraid of what the little man might say?

The latter stared, but seemed submissive enough; indeed, he did not seem to be particularly anxious to stay in the shack. One could almost have suspected him of apprehension.

"Oh, all right!" he grunted. He looked again at Juliet. "Say, Derry," he volunteered, "you're sure crazy, but you certainly do beat all for pickin' —"

"Get out!" said Derry, softly, and Ed got out.

Outside the door, he thrust back a wet, comically contorted face to remark: "I see Kitty down the trail a piece. She looked plumb upset." And he vanished for the night.

The operation was completed, and it had, as a matter of fact, been a rather striking one for a nurse to perform. The bullet was out, the aperture as clean as salt and water could make it, the little syringe had again shot a restorative into the sluggish veins;

there was, for the moment, nothing more to be done. Although Juliet's splendid nerves had carried her safely and powerfully through the ordeal, she found herself sick and shaky when it was over and done with. She knew that never in her life of struggle against death had she come nearer the line of the Great Enemy.

She went to the door, and opened it, breathing the wild wind gratefully, unmindful of the rain that wet her dress and hair.

She did not hear Derry come to her side; she started a little as he spoke to her, in a queer, caressing voice.

"Your little cap is crooked," he said.

She stared at him, and mechanically straightened it. He was looking at her with a smile in his dark eyes.

"You —" She caught her breath. "I think you are a very odd man."

Around them the wet wind whistled, and the light from within the bunk house showed small floods and freshets of liquid red mud whirling at their feet. The man lurched his great body over so that it sheltered her somewhat from the gale. In answer to her rather breathless comment, he nodded in instant agreement.

"Sure!" he said. "Always was. But all the pairs are made of odd ones, ma'am."

His eyes sparkled as over a hidden joke. She felt that in his secretive way he was making fun of her, but she was too tired to speak, and leaned her head against the lintel of the door, while he, with leisurely willingness, did the talking.

"Everything is made in pairs, you see," he was informing her. "And the idea of it's all right. Only we're liable to lose one occasionally. That's how there are so many odd individuals lying around the world, with no mates to them."

The man within stirred and moaned; even as she turned her head alertly to listen, she heard Derry add in a very low voice: "It's funny! The minute I saw you — on the trail — I knew."

She went in to her patient. Derry did not follow her this time, but seemed to wait. In a few minutes she found herself, almost without volition, standing beside him once more. She was suddenly excited and bewildered, and forced herself to be conversational — always watching and listening for sounds or stirrings in the bunk.

"How do you happen to be here, in this crowd of men?" she said.

"Didn't fit in anywhere else." He shrugged his shoulders. "My governor had a factory, and wanted me in with him; I didn't like it. I broke bronchos in Idaho for a while. And packed oranges, and sailed with a tramp steamer that traded at Singapore. And things like that. I never did anything very long. Just lately I've been marking time. Before long I expect I'll come to *doing* it!" He grinned.

His account of himself was brief and desultory enough, yet to her it seemed forceful, and oddly indicative of the man who gave it. Always he appeared to have been a misfit; sometimes too square,

sometimes too slippery — nearly always too large for the place allotted him. She warmed to him, more perhaps than she knew. More than this, her spirit — the freer, less civilized part of it — leaped to him. She felt in him something singularly familiar and companionable.

"You must have lived a very lonely life," she said.

He nodded, and shrugged again.

"Lonely? Oh, yes, I expect so. Sheep farming — that's lonely work, 'most as lonely as nursing. Seems as if nursing must be the loneliest ever."

"Why do you think that?"

He made a quick gesture, suggestive of the hopelessness of expressing it. "Always trying to understand people — people with sick bodies. Sick brains, too. And death often. Death is a mighty lonely thing."

"Yes, I suppose so." She looked at him, wondering. She hesitated. "I — I've often felt like that," she said, with a stiffness born of the unwonted frankness.

If he appreciated the confidence, he did not care to show it.

"To think," he exclaimed, "of a girl like you shut up with dead people, and lunatics, and —"

She could not help laughing a little at the way he put it.

"My patients aren't all hopeless cases," she reminded him.

"No, I reckon not," he admitted, with that characteristically humorous quirk at the corner of his mouth.

"But it seems like a nurse had to face such big things, and take such big chances. It's more than I'd rightly call a girl's share."

She was grave at that, for she took responsibility seriously. "One feels it, of course," she said simply.

"Yes," he said, as though he slowly pondered. "You feel the big things. A few people do. *I* do. And that's all the good it does. Once in a thousand years, two people meet that have the sense of great things deep inside them. They ought to be — friends."

"Yes." She was curt because her heart choked her.

"Just friends. Maybe, when one of the two is a woman, it might be different unless —"

"Unless?"

"One were like you, and one — like me."

Silence between them and the billows of rainy wind breaking in wild music upon the Ridge. Suddenly Juliet found that she was crying, quite gently. Slow tears rolled down her face, and her heart ached with a gripping pain.

"Why, ma'am," said Derry, gently, "don't you reckon that it's just that everything has worked out wrong? The idea was all right — the idea of us two meeting, and — understanding. Only — it got bungled somehow. We've found each other a few hundred years too late — or too soon."

Juliet was silent for a moment, then she spoke clearly, and without self-consciousness.

"I have always known that I had missed my real

lot in life in some way. I think that I became a nurse, because it brought me close to big, strong, brave things. Something in me wants to venture and live and even perhaps suffer. I think I am understanding myself better to-night than ever before. I know that there is a liberty that somehow I am entitled to, but which I can never have. Something has been waiting for me, and I have got to go on without it."

"Yes," said the man, in a steady voice. "We have both got to go on without it."

She was conscious suddenly that he was tensely listening. A puzzled look gleamed in his eyes. Then, through the wind and rain and general confusion of the storm, she heard a distant sound; voices it might be, somewhere afar off, and the faint tread of horses' hoofs.

He drew a deep breath.

"I don't know how they made it so soon," he said, "but I've only a minute or two left."

He put out his hand, and took hers into a close, warm clasp. Something thrilled her pulse at the contact, a current strange and dynamic, that reached her heart.

"I want you to know it from me," he said. "They are coming to take me, girl."

Her mouth was dry.

"Who?" she asked sharply, a shade shrilly.

"The sheriff and the boys from Carkham. There isn't much chance for him in there, is there, in spite of all you could do?" He gave a backward jerk of his

head toward the room. "So — I guess it'll be murder."

Then she understood.

"It was you who shot him? You!"

He nodded. The hoof beats were coming almost imperceptibly nearer. There were distant shouts, as though men urged their horses on a precarious trail.

"He was crazy drunk, and got ugly; and I always was too quick with a gun." Derry spoke regretfully, but seemed to think his simple explanation entirely ample for the occasion.

"But," she gasped, bewilderment and horror struggling with something else which she faintly recognized as fear — fear for him; "but why didn't you get away while there was time?"

She could just see his face in the dim light. It had an odd look.

"I reckon you'll think me a fool," he said, "but — you were here."

"Oh!" whispered Juliet Gray, and drew her hand from his to press it to her eyes.

"You see," Derry Blake pursued calmly, "I've never seen any one quite like you before. It was — my chance, and I took it. It's all right; don't worry. You're as sweet and as plucky as they are made, and a real woman. I reckon there aren't a great many. It has been worth it to be with you, and talk to you, and work beside you to-night. I'm not kicking."

Juliet caught his arm suddenly, and her face was convulsed with feeling.

"You can't stay here and let them take you!" she stormed at him breathlessly. "You can't! You shan't! You are a man—you talk of chances—you will not throw away a chance for your life? Go! Go, I tell you!"

"Not worth while," he said carelessly. "It's too late now, and, anyway — would you care to live with a price on your head? It's murder, you know!"

"It is not murder," she cried, pale as death, and with battle in her eyes. "He is not going to die. I swear to you that I will keep him alive — for you."

"But you have done all that you can."

"I will do *more* than I can," she cried superbly. She clasped her hands in a strange white flame of passionate emotion. "Oh, don't you see," she exclaimed, with a throb in her voice, "there are moments when nothing is impossible? Don't you know that a woman who feels as I do now can conquer death itself?"

CHAPTER V

DEATH THE ENEMY

> ". . . Against all force
> Death ready stands to interpose his dart,
> Fearless to be o'er matched by living might. . . ."
>
> MILTON.

LIKE a shadow, something moved in the night, and Kitty Turley stood before them. In the light that flickered through the open door, she looked white and very haggard — half dead, Juliet thought pityingly, from the buffeting of the storm. In her young slimness, so drenched and weary, she seemed a weak and pathetic thing, overcome by some power of an undiscerning cruelty. To the stronger and bigger-hearted girl she was for the moment immeasurably touching.

"I reckon it's too late, Derry," Kitty said in a tired voice. "But they can't come fast on a night like this, and there's a chance." She listened intently a moment. "I think one of their horses went down a minute ago; the trail's very bad. If you go — now — maybe you could get to the top of the Ridge by the long trail back of Mackanerny's."

There was just a second's pause.

"He is going!" said Juliet, with firm clearness.

She felt herself vibrating with determination. Never in her calm, capable life had she touched a height of power as at this minute. She knew that she could save him, that she could, if need be, make him save himself.

"Ah!" said Kitty Turley, with an odd intonation. "You are sure he will go?"

"Yes," said Juliet, "I am sure he will go."

Derry laughed suddenly — his silent, softly ironical little laugh, only now there was just a suggestion of excitement in it, and of daring.

"Yes, I'm going!" he said. "I'm going because I — want my chance!" He turned to Juliet. "You understand?"

"Yes," she said again, thrilling faintly; "I understand."

And —

"Yes," said Kitty Turley, very quietly, as though she affirmed something which had not been said.

"How shall you know whether or not he — lives?" said Juliet, quickly.

"He must have a message," said Kitty.

"A letter?" said Juliet, vaguely doubtful.

"No, no! How could he get a letter?"

"Mails won't be running often where I'm going!" laughed Derry. He was alert now and watchful, seeming to feel a zest in the imminence of his danger.

"Where will you be?" demanded Juliet.

"He'll be on the mountain somewhere," said Kitty, briefly, and he nodded. They all spoke tersely and

tensely now, as though packing speech into a limited and closely estimated space.

"You'd better neither of you know just where I am," said Derry, rapidly. "I'll be on the Ridge somewhere. How long before he is out of danger, ma'am?"

"Three days — if he lives through to-night."

"Right! In three days I'll look for a message; it'd better be a signal. That will be Sunday. There is an open space on the trail leading over the Ridge into Battlebrook. Could you make out to go to church in Battlebrook on Sunday, Kitty?"

She nodded silently.

"Poor child! I reckon that part'll be mighty hard on you. But I shall be somewhere on the mountain watching that open trail on Sunday morning. And you'll walk down it. And if Nat here is going to pull through, you'll wear a white dress. See? And if he — goes out ——"

"I'll wear red," said Kitty. There was no emotion in her voice, but her eyes suddenly burned in the dimness, Juliet could not tell whether with hate or another passion.

"Right!" said Derry, once more.

He turned to Juliet, but did not touch her hand again.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by," she whispered. "Oh, hurry! You must — you *must* get away!"

"If I am free," he said; "if I hear in three days that I am free — I shall come back."

He waited, and for a heartbeat, time stood still.

"Yes," said Juliet, steadily, meeting his brilliant eyes with her own, clear and lovely; "if you are free — come back."

He turned and plunged into the darkness, walking with long and springing strides that seemed to make little sound, and were in any case immediately lost in the din and tumult of the wild night.

Juliet, trembling still a little, turned to look for Kitty Turley, but she, too, had disappeared. She had not gone with Derry, but she had melted into the storm, like some part of it returning to its integral element.

Juliet was alone with her patient, and in the distance she could hear already the echo of men's voices and the splash and thud of stumbling hoof beats coming down the steep upper trail to the left of the shack.

She went into the bunk house, and closed the door.

Nat Mooney was restless and feverish. He mutterred to himself, and tried, moaning, to thrash about with the arm nearest his wound. Juliet was tempted to administer another sedative, but waited now to learn what hope there was of seeing the doctor that night. She did what she could to make him comfortable, every nerve strained to listen the while. The wind was howling with redoubled fury, and she lost the sound of the approaching posse, until during a momentary lull she heard a commotion of voices and creaking leather at the very door.

She started up from the bunk, over which she had

been bending, and saw Craig Evart's anxious and pale face in the doorway.

"Juliet! Miss Gray! Thank God!" he ejaculated, with such unmistakable relief that she must have been touched under any other conditions. "When we did not find you at Mackanerny's, I was half out of my mind. Then the road washed away, and — well, it looked as though fate had it in for me for fair."

Juliet felt that in his place Derry would have contrived to find her, despite fifty washouts, but she merely said: "It's too bad you were so anxious. I came straight up to my patient, as you see."

She blushed for her mendacity, for her way to her patient had been anything but straight.

"I knew that the only way to get up here at all was to go around," pursued Evarts, walking into the room with much swishing and crackling of wet rubber, "so I got a horse and joined the Carkham gang, and —"

"Is the doctor coming?" demanded Juliet, cutting him short without ceremony.

"He's on his way by this time, I imagine. He was finishing up a bad case between here and Battlebrook, but promised to come on as soon as he could."

"Thank Heaven for that, anyway!" said Juliet. Then she added rather irritably: "Would you mind trying to be more quiet? This is a sick room, you know."

"I — I beg your pardon," said the young man, surprised at her tone. "I'm afraid I was a bit thought-

less. Poor chap! He — he's not dead yet, I suppose, Ju — Miss Gray?"

Juliet looked at him with the exasperation of great effort and great fatigue.

"No!" she returned defiantly. "He is not dead yet!" And she squared her back.

Never, she thought, had Evarts seemed so trying. Had he always been as inept, as clumsy, and as terribly, hopelessly well meaning? She supposed that he had, only now she noticed it more definitely. Her senses seemed abnormally quickened. Keyed to her present sharp pitch, she demanded keenness of tone in surrounding harmonies. Evarts' slower and duller vibration jarred the high timber of her mood like a discord.

When the sheriff from Carkham entered, a moment later, he was met by a girl whose face was as white as her gown and cap, who stared at him resentfully, and made him feel, as he declared afterward, "as if he'd done the job, 'stead o' wantin' to nab the feller as had!"

"Well?" she demanded fiercely.

"Pardon, ma'am," said the Virginian sheriff, a huge, rawboned creature, slow of utterance and swift of action. "When you-all come hyar, did yo' happen to see —"

"Are you the sheriff?" said Juliet, crisply.

"Why — yes, ma'am," he admitted, taken aback by her bluntness.

"Very well. I asked to save time; you seem rather

slow in talking, and my time is valuable. If you want to know if I met any one suspicious on my way here, I can only say that I did see a man skulking in the bushes, about half a mile below. When he saw me, he ran down the mountain, in that direction." She pointed behind the cabin.

"Down the mountain!" exclaimed the sheriff — and various men who were peering over his shoulder repeated: "Down the mountain!" in tones of surprise. They had all counted on the fugitive's having struck into the trackless woods, where it would be difficult to hunt him down.

"Yo' are sure of that, ma'am?" said the sheriff.

"I am sure of what I saw. I can't guarantee the man to be the one you're after." Juliet's voice was getting a trifle high and strained. Her heart drummed in her ears.

"Oh, it must have been the fellow!" exclaimed Evarts, confidently. "He's probably trying to make the railway line!"

Juliet glanced at him with the contemptuous aversion which a woman feels for a man whom she has too easily deceived. The sheriff seemed less credulous.

"Don't sound like Derry Blake, somehow," he murmured. "He'd know we'd have warned the railway people. I certainly thought he'd strike the trail, and lay low till one of his pals put him on to how things was a-goin'."

"Pals?" repeated Evarts.

"Oh, you'll find all the boys that worked with him'll stand in with him," said the sheriff, indifferently. "There's Ed Wade, for instance. Mack, didn't you say Ed was a friend of his?"

The little foreman, evidently in the gloom without, grunted an assent.

"Reckon we'll watch Ed," proceeded the sheriff. "As for this chap the young lady see — yo' reckon he went *down*hill, ma'am?"

"I tell you that he *did* go downhill," said Juliet, sharply. But she looked at the gawky sheriff with slight respect.

"We-e—ll," he drawled dubiously. "I reckon we'll have to take a chance on yo'r having seen straight, ma'am."

He took off his wide hat with a flourish, smiled humorously at her, and departed with his men to track Juliet's imaginary outlaw down the storm-swept hillside. Her little flight of fancy kept the Carkham posse busy for quite a few long, wet, swearing hours that night.

When they had gone, the nurse, oblivious to Evarts, turned her attention once more to her patient, working over him with a face of grim and passionate devotion which somewhat startled the young man who looked on. Effacing himself as much as possible, he waited in the shadows, and she struggled on with her solitary fight against death — a fight that separated itself into a hundred vital battles — one for every minute. For two hours more Juliet strove against the increas-

ing weakness of the man, the lack of life-keeping facilities, the sense of hopelessness, the thousand and one enemies that seemed to beset her with snares that grew with every second. She was fighting with strength, and will, and training, and heart, and brain, and soul. And she was praying; she did not remember having prayed before since she was a little girl.

It was nearly morning when Doctor Clement dismounted at the door of the shack. Craig Evarts hastened out to meet him, and get his horse under cover of a rude shed near by. The young man had never been so grateful for anything in his life as he now was for the arrival of the doctor, a rough-looking, tender-hearted country practitioner, wrapped up in his profession. Most people were glad to see him come.

Juliet was gray and nearly staggering from strain. Her eyes, vividly blue and set in dark rings, fixed themselves on the physician's face as though he were to be her executioner.

Doctor Clement dropped his overcoat in a soaking heap on the floor, and proceeded to the bunk.

"There was every reason, medically speaking, why the man ought to have died," he said, looking at her. "How did you do it?"

"I don't know," she said faintly. "I — don't know."

Craig Evarts' solemn, rather scared young face was thrust between them.

"I — I suppose it's too late for the doctor to be of

much use?" he said in a decorous whisper. "Of course you would pronounce it willful murder, doctor?"

"Willful murder nothing!" said the hearty doctor. "It isn't any kind of murder. The man's going to live!"

And they wondered, both of them, why Miss Gray, most excellent of surgical nurses, nearly broke down then and there, and had to go to the door for a time, and stand there, drawing deep breaths of the damp dawn wind, and looking off to the woods that reached black under the paling sky to the crest of the Ridge.

"You'll have to stay on duty for to-night, of course," said the doctor, when he had finished his supplementary treatment of the patient.

Juliet nodded.

"But," he added, "you will want sleep to-morrow. Craig here will see that you get back to Evartston for a rest if— By Jove, though, you'll have trouble getting back, unless you go by the long way."

Craig interposed vigorously: "The long way'll do. She's going back to Evartston for good. We shan't let her come back here at all."

"Why, what nonsense—" began Juliet.

The doctor helped her out bluntly. "Stuff, my boy! If I know Miss Gray, she is too good and thorough a nurse to abandon any patient at this stage of the game. She can go back for the day, and can get over the roads, and the Turley girl can come here for five or six hours and take her place. She's

engaged to the fellow, anyway, Kitty Turley is, and I suspect she's at the bottom of this mess — little baggage!" The doctor was too busy a man, by boast and practice, to mince his phrases, or to call a spade a dessert spoon. He now added grimly, "She ought to have some of the trouble!"

"Is Miss Evarts all right?" Juliet asked.

"Aunt Alicia is flourishing," said Craig. "She said you weren't even to think of her. But, Miss Gray — you can't wear yourself out on a — a case like this. Don't you see —"

"As if one night's nursing could wear me out!" exclaimed Juliet, scornfully. "I shan't even try to go back for the day, doctor. I shall stay here. If — if — Miss Turley will come in to-morrow for a few hours, and let me lie down, I shall do very well indeed."

"Where on earth can you lie down here?" asked Craig, looking at the tiers of dingy bunks.

"Soldiers and nurses and beggars can't be choosers," she said, smiling rather wanly. "Are you going back to-night yourself, Mr. Evarts?"

"To-night! It is morning, already," he said. And, indeed, the door was already a square of lightening gray. "The doctor and I shall go up to the shack above and get some coffee from the men. I'll bring you some."

"Thanks. There seems to be some on the shelf here. I'll make my own. If you'll stop here later, I'll give you a list of things to bring me to-night or to-morrow."

"But," expostulated Craig Evarts, "how long do you propose to stay?"

"I don't know, Mr. Evarts."

"Till the fellow dies?"

Juliet's eyes flamed.

"No," she said. "Till he is out of danger."

"Aha! That's the way to talk," smiled Doctor Clement. "That's your born nurse, my lad — the one, incurable, unreasoning, God-inspired optimist! Miss Gray have you nitroglycerin there?"

But as he was riding to the upper shack with Craig Evarts fifteen minutes later, the doctor mused aloud.

"Logically the man should die," he said. "He is, so to speak, mortally wounded. But that woman is going to save him."

"She's one in a million," said Evarts, proudly.

"Eh? What's that? Oh, doubtless, doubtless! An admirable nurse, clear-headed, and not afraid of a rational risk, although I'd rather have her in an emergency case than a hospital! However, I wasn't thinking of her professional ability for the moment." The doctor rode in speculative silence for a hundred feet before he said: "You know life and death are queer things. Sometimes they go out of the hands of the surgeons and physicians, and that's where mental — and emotional — therapeutics come in. I once saw a woman bring a man out of a moribund condition just by sheer force of will — but she loved him." He mused once more.

"What are you getting at?" asked Evarts, curiously.

"I don't know," confessed Doctor Clement, with a short laugh. "I don't understand it. I would have sworn that no woman could fight so violently for anything except — her love! Look! It is morning, and I must be getting back. You'll stop at the shack here? No coffee, thanks. The fellows seem to be stirring already. Good-by! I'll ride over to Turley's, and tell Kitty to come down later on, and I'll be back to-morrow, unless we have a storm that washes the mountain altogether away."

He rode on, and Evarts went into the crowded bunk house to beg a breakfast and a rest of his men.

The storm had stopped, and the clouds were rolling away in black and purple waves under the dull yellow light that rose wanly in the east. Dawn was breaking over Liberty Ridge.

CHAPTER VI

THE TURLEYS

"Not one permissible impulse moves the man, . . .
Why, lie, rob, if it must be, Murder!
The fraudful trap
Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet
Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play.
The fine
Felicity and flower of wickedness.
. . . The utmost exercise
Of violence, made safe and sure by craft
To satiate malice . . ."

The Ring and the Book.

"GOOD morning!"

Juliet started, and lifted her weary face. Kitty Turley was standing at the door of the shack.

The clearing of the skies at dawn had not been more complete and wonderful than the renovation of Kitty's charming face, so haggard a few hours ago. Now, with that fine resiliency of youth and health, Kitty was new made, a little pale as to lips, a little under-penciled as to eyes, but as fresh as a flower, some strange, clear-colored mountain flower, hardy-rooted, yet delicate of look. Her brown calico dress and faded blue sunbonnet looked cold wear for the blustering autumn day, till one noted the creamy rose

bloom on her flesh, and realized that such lavish and warm blood could dispense with heavy coverings.

"Doctor said I was to take turns watching him, and let you sleep," she proceeded, advancing with an easy step.

"Thanks — I am awfully tired." Juliet pressed her hands against her temples, that were damp with fatigue. The night of struggle had been interminable. "I'll be very glad to rest, and I really think I could sleep anywhere now."

She glanced with tired distaste at the uninviting bunk which awaited her, then began to arrange medicines and bandages for Kitty. The girl watched her curiously. "Do you know anything about nursing?" Juliet asked her.

"Nursing?" she repeated vaguely, and then, with complete heartlessness, she added: "Oh, I reckon I know enough to nurse Nat!"

Juliet was revolted by the hard disdain of the tone.

"I suppose," the nurse said coldly, "you mean that your affection can take the place of training."

Kitty laughed pleasantly enough, and did not contradict her, but there was no love in the glance she flung to the patient.

"I hope Derry has gotten up the Ridge safely," she said.

Kitty had a singular trick of saying little things that sounded irrelevant until you analyzed them; then you were apt to wonder at the subtlety of her mental processes. As a matter of fact, Kitty's mind worked

intuitively, not intelligently; her shrewdness was native and instinctive, and she never really thought.

"At least," Juliet responded, "the storm has lifted."

"Yes," said the girl, "it's a nice, open day." She looked through the door in a ruminative way, and slowly stretched herself. "One could purr," she said.

"You are rather like a pussy cat, aren't you?" Juliet said, smiling faintly. She was taking off her cap, and loosening her stiff gown at the throat.

"Yes," said Kitty. "Dad always thought so." She sat down lazily near the bunk, and seemed to dream for a full minute. "I was christened Matilda," she remarked.

It was another minute before Juliet's weary brain had grasped the fact that the name by which the little thing was known had grown out of her catlike attributes.

The wounded man was resting quietly. He had been conscious and delirious in the early morning; now his temperature had dropped, and he was under the influence of an opiate.

"I don't believe you will have any trouble looking out for him," said Juliet. "Wake me if you should be at all troubled or doubtful what to do. Do you like to nurse people?"

"I reckon I'm too lazy," said Kitty, smiling. "But I like taking care of puppies and birds — anything little."

"You are little yourself," said Juliet.

"Yes." Kitty obviously was not interested in the conversation.

But Juliet persisted. She felt an odd desire for the child to be friendly toward her — and this in spite of Derry's shadow between them.

"I feel very big and awkward beside you." Juliet's voice was delightfully gentle and winning. "You move so quickly and daintily. It seems as if your mind must move quickly and daintily, too."

Kitty looked at her with those sweet and melancholy brown eyes.

"That's a funny thing," softly and reflectively. "Moving quick, and moving slow, and minds — Some people get to things so much quicker than others — Same with animals."

"I don't think my mind works very quickly, as a rule," said honest Juliet.

She was already lying down in the bunk at the opposite side of the room when Kitty said casually: —

"When we dropped the bars down, it took Spot nearly two days to find she could get out."

"Who is Spot?" asked Juliet, drowsily.

"Our cow," said Kitty.

There was silence, and, too weary even to be offended, Juliet closed her eyes. Kitty sat, motionless and relaxed, beside the unconscious man.

At first the nurse's sleep was light and uncomfortable, the result of overfatigue of nerves. She woke constantly with many starts, and had to forcibly com-

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pose her limbs, fighting the nervous impulse toward restlessness. When she began to dream, it was in fantastic flashes, from which she invariably fell with a sick plunge into wakefulness and a vague consciousness of the bunk house, the white-faced man, and Kitty, immobile and brooding as a little Sphinx.

At last she fell into deeper and quieter sleep, and the dreams, while no less fantastic, grew more sustained. She seemed, on a sudden, to be rushing along the top of Liberty Ridge in a racing automobile. The sense of speed was emphatic, also the sense of the need for it. For some reason, the car was being urged to greater and still greater speed. A word, indistinguishable at first, drummed in her head like some incoherent telegraphic message. At last it sounded clearly: Escape! Escape! Escape! Escape from what? She did not know, but she felt breathlessly pressed for time. At the same moment she became conscious of the man who sat beside her, and who appeared to be driving the car ever faster and faster. It was Derry Blake, and she noticed that he was without his hat, and was looking very handsome. Suddenly, in this odd dream, he turned to her and laughed. And at that moment the car leaped forward into blackness; and, after falling a long, precipitous way, she once more awoke.

So confused was she by the vividness and excitement of the dream, that for a moment she did not even open her eyes, but lay still, letting full consciousness flood her brain, by degrees. In another moment,

she was sufficiently wide awake to notice the low, steady sound of voices, or rather of a voice.

Nat Mooney was conscious now, and faintly moaning. Kitty still sat beside him, but she was talking. Her voice was very soft and sibilant; indeed, it signally sustained her likeness to a cat, a cat that now hissed, now purred. Her eyes, in that light, were so luminous as to be almost phosphorescent. Leaning forward, in a crouching attitude, with head thrust forward, and lips scarcely parted as she spoke, she looked incredibly, repellently feline.

"If it weren't that *he'd* swing for it," she was saying, "I could wish he'd killed you dead, Nat Mooney! I reckon you know, down in your heart, that I never had any use for you; I never cared a scrap for you. I just let you tag along after me, because you'd once boasted you'd never be tied to a girl's apron string, and I liked folks to laugh at you. And to make him jealous — I wanted *that* awfully! But I don't reckon he ever was. Men like him don't need to be jealous. It's clumsy, good-for-nothing chaps like you that go plumb crazy with jealousy, and — and" — she laughed with wicked sweetness — "get shot up for it! Did you reckon, Nat, that you could get the better of Derry Blake in a gun-pulling game?"

The man groaned again, and flung out his arm, whether in pain or protest, one could not say.

"He'll beat you every time!" taunted Kitty, her eyes like vivid slits of flame. "He'll always win from

you, Nat — whether it's poker, or guns, or — sweethearts!" Her cruel little teeth showed for a moment, as she smiled into his twisted face. "It's a pity a man like him should have to be in hiding because of a man like you — oh, it's a wicked shame, that it is! But, only for that, I could be happy enough to sing and to dance just for the joy of seeing you lie there this minute! You always used to be begging for kisses, Nat. See me here, so close to you — so close! How would you like to kiss me now?"

She leaned nearer to him. Her whole body seemed undulating with the revolting pleasure which inflates a cat while it slowly and happily tortures a mouse to death.

"Miss Turley!" exclaimed Juliet, shocked and stern.

Kitty recoiled slightly. Her face, as she turned it toward the other girl, was infinitely malign. Her delicate little tanned hands actually opened and shut like claws that sheathed and unsheathed themselves. Juliet knew that the child would have liked to hiss at her.

"I see," the nurse said, with the iciest anger, "that I cannot trust you. I must get some one else to sit with my patient while I rest."

"I haven't touched him," said Kitty, sullenly.

"Touched him! I should think not! But you could very easily do him great harm by exciting him in that way."

She went to the moaning man, and busied herself

in trying to make him more comfortable on the hard bed. Kitty sat silent for a moment. Then she spoke: —

"Do you reckon it might make him really worse, my talking to him like that?"

"I certainly do! And why you should wish to —"

"Worse enough to die?"

"Perhaps."

Juliet spoke coldly. She was dissolving two pellets in a tin cup of water, and appeared to be giving them her whole attention.

Kitty once more considered the matter, still sitting hunched up on her chair.

"Well," she said at last, "I don't want Derry to hang. At least, I *think* I don't, though I'm not sure it wouldn't be nicer than — Anyway, while I decide how I feel about that, would you like me to bring you down something to eat, and some more stuff for bandages and things?"

Juliet looked at her in amazement.

"Oh, it's all right; I'll be good for the present," Kitty assured her coolly. "I hadn't thought it all out, and when I saw Nat lying there, shot up, I couldn't help making fun of him a little. He used to be so proud of his gun play!"

"Oh, how can you?" exclaimed Juliet, flushing sensitively at the girl's cruelty.

"You *are* soft!" was Kitty's comment. And, with her usual queer irrelevance: "I shouldn't have

thought he'd have looked twice at any one as soft-hearted — or as big — as you!"

The flush deepened, and Juliet turned away to hide it. This time she understood the girl without analysis.

Kitty rose slowly, and strolled to the door.

"I think," she drawled, "that you and I shall have to have a little talk about things one of these days. But meanwhile — mind you, I don't say for how long — I'll work with you. We both," Kitty said, very plainly, "want Derry to get off."

She departed on that, leaving Juliet rather breathless. So was the temporary truce declared, and it seemed to the older girl, whose life had been passed in decorous and civilized purlieus, that a more curious pact had never been made. But for the time being, she thought she could trust Kitty Turley. And it looked as though this assumption were right, for the mountain girl appeared an hour later with corn pones, ham, fresh eggs, and a little pail of milk for the invalid. She was quite loaded down, for she carried as well an old cotton sheet to be torn up, and a cake of soap.

"This time," she said cheerfully, "you can get a rest. I'll watch all afternoon and I'll be just as good as gold. Reckon I'd better keep busy making bandages or something, though! Me and Satan are old friends, and you know 'idle hands —'" She laughed infectiously.

"Will you forgive me?" Juliet could not help say-

ing impulsively. "But how — how did you get your pretty way of speaking?"

"'Me and Satan' isn't grammar!" said Kitty, slyly.

"Well, no! But you knew it wasn't when you said it, didn't you? That's just the difference. I suppose I'm impertinent, but I couldn't help wondering —"

"I went to school in Charlottesville," said Kitty, carelessly, as she unloaded her bundles. "And then — mother's people were 'quality.' She ran away to marry dad, and then died. I reckon she couldn't stand him. He's where I get my wickedness! Both my older brothers died, so dad had to train me to be bad enough to make up for 'em!"

Juliet believed this statement five hours later, when, after a deep, refreshing nap, she woke to find Kitty in low conversation with her father at the door.

"What a sinful-looking old man!" thought the girl, as she lay still a moment to watch him. "I believe he could be guilty of anything in this world!"

Dan Turley was indeed a vicious-looking old person, with fierce and wicked eyes like those of a buzzard, and a silver beard too tobacco-soiled to be venerable. A savage and sinister creature he appeared, seeming to belong to a primitive and viperous animal life. He was quite old — well over seventy — but he seemed as little incapacitated as a centenarian turtle or an ancient but healthy Gila monster.

Derry Blake had once said of him that he had been

"pickled in crime," and it was true that his seven decades of life had been so infiltrated with violence, lawbreaking, and treachery, that one might fairly consider evil his native element. He certainly could never have thrived in a clean moral air. A moonshiner who did not even distil sound liquor, a horse thief who cheated his pals, and turned "peacher" whenever he scented legal difficulties, a road agent who had some ugly and unnecessary acts of cruelty notched on his record — Dan Turley was in ill repute with the outlaws as well as with the law. A dangerous, bad-hearted old man he was, with, however, just one pleasing human attribute — a passionate affection for his daughter Kitty.

She appeared just now to be giving him directions of some sort, for she kept nodding her head imperatively, and he listened with a kind of surly attentiveness. As Juliet sat up and put her hands to her disordered hair, they both turned.

"Oh, you're awake, are you?" said Kitty, quite amiably. "Would you care to meet dad? I can't exactly recommend him as an acquaintance, but I've known folks to find him interesting!"

"'Specially the p'leece!" amended the dreadful old man, with a baleful grin.

Juliet, inwardly appalled, murmured something vague as she arose, and then questioned Kitty concerning the patient. It appeared from her indifferent account that he had moaned a good deal, and in one period of unwonted coherence had complained of

being very hot. The nurse unscrewed her thermometer case promptly, and, as she bent over Nat Mooney, heard the unembarrassed commentaries of the two Turleys.

"She's a good-lokin' gal," was old Dan's verdict.

"Very large!" Kitty opined disparagingly.

"Ya-as. She's right large. But Ah allus hev laked mah helpin's to be gen'rous, when the eatin's anyways tasty!" And he chuckled, crassly impudent. In spite of her instinctive displeasure, Juliet found it hard not to laugh.

"Dad is going to take a horse up the mountain by and by," Kitty volunteered, and a meaning note in her voice told Juliet that the horse was intended for Derry Blake.

"I ain't got no hawse," said Mr. Turley, in a complaining and protesting tone.

"Well, you can get one, then," rejoined his daughter, calmly. "You've gotten them before now, you know! I never knew you to want for a horse, dad."

"But folks ain't allus very gen'rous with their hawses!" murmured the old man, regretfully. He turned to Juliet. "Very hard an' selfish folks is, missy! Mebbe —" He leered crookedly. "Mebbe Ah might mek shift to mek some un gen'rous 'spite of himself, though. Mebbe —"

"Say right out that you know one you can steal!" said Kitty. "We don't mind!"

Juliet felt a slight shock at this confident assumption of her complicity.

"Ain't a lovin' darter a beautiful thing, missy?" said old Turley.

"How will you get the horse to — to —" Juliet hesitated.

"To Derry?" said Kitty, unabashed. "Well, he's sure to be somewhere on Crazy Run."

"Crazy Run?"

"The only stream on the Ridge — and not much fun to ford, is it, dad?"

"Ah've done it!" said "dad," grinning.

"Yes — when the boys were after you! And Derry can do it, if he has a horse that's any good at all. But, anyhow, he's sure to be somewhere there on account of drinking water."

"Likely in the Shutter," said Turley.

"The Shutter," explained the young girl, "is a little cave with a blind entrance; a stone that covers it so you can't see it. It's a great place to hide. What's the matter?"

Juliet was reading her clinical thermometer with an anxious face.

"He's quite feverish," she said in a low tone. "It's a bad sign, of course, but there's no need to feel at all hopeless. He's a drinking man, isn't he?"

"Rather!" laughed Kitty.

"Most men is what I call drinkin' men," said Dan Turley, meditatively. "But Nat — why, Ah reckon Ah've seen Nat sober as much as twice. Ah *reckon* Ah hev, but Ah cyan' think just when!"

"Of course," said Juliet, "it will count against him now."

"But about the horse —" began Kitty.

"Speakin' o' hawses," remarked Dan, whose hearing seemed to have only grown sharper with advancing years. "Don' I hyar —"

It was Craig Evarts who rode up to the bunk-house door, breathless. He had been in the saddle nearly all day, having ridden home to Evartston in the morning, and snatched but a hurried luncheon before starting back again on his own splendid horse, Regis.

"How are you, Miss Turley? Hello, Dan! Been poisoning my boys with any more of your applejack? Miss Gray! You are all right?"

He swung himself to the ground, and his face grew very eager as he pulled off his cap and caught her hand in his for a swift, vehement moment.

He had brought all sorts of comforts, medical supplies, and messages galore.

"Louise begs you to come back at once," he said, laughing. "She insists that you will be eaten by bandits or something! I tried to convince her that desperadoes were not necessarily cannibals, but she responded that I was a heartless brute and not half anxious enough about your safety. I don't think, you know, that she was quite right about that!" His eyes flashed to hers; then he went quickly on: "But Aunt Alicia is a sport! She says that she feels better than for weeks, thanks to the tonic of a little vicarious excitement. And I was to tell you further that she is delighted that 'the poor dear murderer

got away'! I quote her verbatim. Such is the feminine sense of justice!"

"That's a right smart hawse, Mistah Evahts," said old Turley, smiling with an abominable attempt at amiability.

"Regis is the most splendid fellow on earth," said Evarts, warmly. "Miss Gray — I am actually fonder of him than the big sixty!"

"I should hope so — bless him!" she said indignantly, stroking the lovely creature's nose.

Regis, a superb, satin-bright chestnut, puffed his breath in and out self-consciously, tossed his handsome head, and lowered it again in a beguiling way, presenting his broad, white-starred forehead for caresses.

"Can't I come in for a moment and talk to you?" begged the young man, under his breath.

"I wish you would."

But inside the shack she would only discuss Nat, and beg Evarts to get a message to Doctor Clement with as little delay as possible. She was so unaffectedly distressed by the gravity of the case, so disproportionately absorbed in it, that Evarts felt a little pang of disappointment.

"You know," he said wistfully, "I'm very anxious about you — all alone up here."

"I'm not alone," she said quietly. "For occupation I have my patient, and for companionship" — she dropped her voice and smiled faintly — "the Turleys!"

"But for protection?"

"My uniform," she said simply. "I have never heard of its being insufficient anywhere or at any time."

It was late afternoon by this time, and the air was becoming fired with the chill flame of sunset. The rising wind sang its way down through the bright russet trees, and the light that lay upon the cabin floor was primrose-colored. A green glow in the sky promised a cold night.

"I must go," said Craig Evarts, abruptly.

She walked with him as far as the door. There they both started with the same question on their lips: —

"Where is Regis?"

Along the trail that passed the house the wind was blowing a scattered army of dry and fluttering autumn leaves. The Turleys and the horse were gone.

CHAPTER VII

THE STOLEN HORSE

> "And Universal Pan, 'tis said, was there,
> And though none saw him, through the adamant
> Of, the deep mountains, . . .
> like a want
> He passed out of his everlasting lair
> Where the quick heart of the great world doth pant,
> And felt that wondrous lady all alone."
>
> PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

"By gad!" ejaculated Craig Evarts, furiously. "This is a little too much! The old scoundrel!"

"Turley?"

"I should say so! He's notorious for this sort of thing, but he never did anything as barefaced as this."

He dashed off in his usual headlong way, but almost instantly realized the uselessness of that, and began to examine the ground for the marks of the horse's hoofs. He was shaking with rage.

"They can't have gone far," said Juliet. Her heart was pounding, and she, too, felt obsessed with anger and excitement. It was a detestable, a wicked act that the Turleys had committed! And she felt herself stained and tarnished by it. She, Juliet Gray, in league with a horse thief! And that — she

thought in her present revulsion of feeling — was just about what it came to! Later, when people began to find out that she had helped Derry Blake to escape, Evarts would think that she had kept him talking in the shack to give her friends — her friends — time to steal his horse! Oh, horrible!

"They can't have gone far!" she repeated desperately.

Even in his rage, Evarts found himself grateful for her evident emotion — an emotion which he was glad to assume was indignation for his loss.

"You're an angel!" he said gratefully. "No, they can't be far. How long were we inside the shack? Five minutes? Ten minutes?"

"Oh, at least —" She checked herself. She was about to say fifteen minutes, but some instinct made her substitute: "At least five or six."

"Regis is a fast horse, of course; still" — he bent still closer to examine the tracks in the fading light — "I can't understand it," he muttered. "The mud is fresh, and you'd think there would be a perfect record; yet I can't find any tracks leading away from this place. Regis couldn't very well have flown away!"

"There's a good deal of turf," Juliet reminded him. "And, anyway, why couldn't they have taken him away through the woods?"

"There's nothing but underbrush and scattered trees between us and the bare rock, on one side, you see. The other's too steep, and too thickly wooded;

we should have heard them crashing through the trees. No, they couldn't have left the trail anywhere that I can see within a hundred yards. It's like a nightmare. Damnation! I beg your pardon a million times, Miss Gray. But you must admit it's enough to make a man swear. If I catch Dan Turley—"

"Are you-all lookin' fo' anythin', Mistah Evahts?"

Both Craig and Juliet wheeled on the instant, and were petrified to see that aged miscreant standing on the trail regarding them with an unusually mild expression in his evil old eyes.

"See here!" almost shouted Evarts, beside himself with wrath at the very sight of Dan Turley. "Where is my horse?"

"Yo'r hawse?" repeated Dan, gently.

"Yes, my horse, you confounded old robber! What have you done with my horse?"

"I hevn't teched yo'r hawse, Mistah Evahts." The tone of humble yet hurt dignity was excellent.

"I left him tied here ten minutes ago."

"Ah cyan' help that, suh! Mah darter an' I jes' walked up the road a piece, an' yo'r hawse was a-standin' hyar, when we left."

"Come, Dan! Maybe I'll let you off this time, if you bring that beast back to me, and save me the trouble of getting the boys, and making up a search party."

"No, suh." The old man shook his head cheerfully. "Ah cyan' do that, suh."

"You're going to have the nerve to brave it out?"

"You cyan' prove nothin' on me this time, Mistah Evahts." And he grinned.

"We'll see whether or not I can prove it! And, anyway, I guess the boys won't need many proofs where you're concerned, Dan. We all know you."

"Ya-as, suh. But you see it's this way, Mistah Evahts; sence you-all shut down on the s'loons down by the switchback, the boys cyan' get no liquor 'ceptin' from me. An' I reckon they ain't lynchin' their source of supplies!"

To Juliet this argument seemed absurd, but Evarts knew too well that it was one worth considering seriously.

"You're in a risky business, Dan, if you're counting on that to save you."

"No, suh. Ah'm trustin' to mah innocent character to save me!" Dan looked like a particularly malevolent demon as he spoke. "Ah'm jest a-pointin' out to you-all, Mistah Evahts, that it'd be against the boys' int'rusts to pers'cute me on a trumped-up charge."

"Trumped up! Of all the nerve! Why, I bet Kitty's riding the horse now."

"Not *just* now," struck in Kitty herself sweetly, standing just behind him.

She was delicately flushed, and a light as of battle or of exultation glowed in her dark eyes. Her tone held the most insolent inflection to which Juliet had ever listened. "I'm hoping to, though, some day,"

she added, smiling. "He's a very fast horse, isn't he, Mr. Evarts?"

"You have evidently found him so!" said Evarts, white with fury.

"Yes," said Kitty. "I've often watched you riding him. He's right sure-footed in rough going, too."

"Miss Turley," said Evarts, bluntly. "There's no use beating about the bush. I know that your father and you stole that horse."

"Mr. Evarts," returned she, with brilliant eyes, "I don't care a damn what you know!"

Her father chuckled.

"I tell him," he remarked, "that he cyan' prove it!"

"Prove it! I wish he'd go right ahead and try! We don't live under lynch law at present, thank Heaven."

"You've good reason to be grateful!" interpolated Evarts, grimly.

"And suspicion doesn't hang people nowadays, nor yet put them in jail — not even in Virginia! Go on, and prove that we took your horse if you can. If we took him, what have we done with him?"

"I propose to find out, thanks!" said Evarts. "Miss Gray, I'm going to hunt up Mack. I'll see you by and by."

He raised his cap hurriedly to Juliet, and started off at the long, free run of the athlete down the trail.

The Turleys looked at one another, and laughed.

"Dead easy!" declared Kitty.

"But of course, honey," her father added, "he's, as yo' might say, some suspicious."

"Slightly! But Derry will have the horse, and after that let them do their best to fix it on us!"

"I don't reckon they can prove nothin'," said the old man, calmly enough. "But we'll have a heap of trouble all the same."

"Pshaw!" Kitty snapped her fingers. "I'd like to see the Virginia jury that would convict me of horse stealing."

"Evahts would never press that," said Turley. "It would make him plumb unpop'lar, an' he's thinkin' of politics. But mebbe he wouldn't feel the same 'bout jailin *me!*"

"You weren't away long enough to be guilty, if they come to count it up."

"Oh, wa'n't I?" He chuckled again.

"*You* can testify to that, can't you?" said Kitty, turning to Juliet. "There'll be several things for you to testify to, I reckon!"

"How did you send him the horse?" demanded the nurse, brusquely and irrelevantly.

"Little girls shouldn't ask questions," answered Kitty, with a light laugh. "It's better for your own sake for you not to know too much. You see, you have to play the innocent part with Evarts."

"Play the innocent part!" exclaimed Juliet, flushing painfully. "Why, I *am* innocent! Mr. Evarts is my friend!"

"Oh, stuff! When you kept him out of the way just to help along the game, and—"

"Oh, how can you say such horrible things!" gasped Juliet, as palè now as she had been flushed before. "You talk as though you really believed I had done it on purpose!"

"So you did — as per agreement. At least," said Kitty, brutally, "that's what we shall say!"

"Oh! *Oh!*"

Juliet felt sick with the thought of what she had brought on herself. In that moment she hated herself for having helped Derry, and scourged her own soul for every lie that she had told for him, for every thought she had given him. He was the sort of man who escaped on a stolen horse; she was the sort of woman who lied to an innocent friend to save a guilty stranger! All life seemed hideous and untrue to the girl in that moment.

"I shall tell Mr. Evarts everything!" she cried in a flame of vehemence. "I shall explain my part in the whole miserable business, and ask him to —"

She paused to draw a sobbing breath; in her passion of remorse and resentment she stumbled among words, and found none that met her need.

Kitty looked at her with a kind of scornful pity.

"So you're a peacher, after all!" she said.

The strange flame passed swiftly, leaving Juliet very cold and steady and a little faint. As her head cleared, she saw suddenly that she was committed to this situation, that in her heart she had willed, and

still willed, to be so committed; and that this deceit and dishonesty, so cruelly distasteful to her candor, were all part of the price which she must pay. The price — for what? For something new and large and completing which had come to her womanhood, for that odd and almost terrible assuagement of heart which grows out of merging one's hopes and interests in another life.

"No," she said quietly, "I did not mean that. Of course, I shall tell no one anything. But I am sorry you had to steal the horse."

She went into the cabin, and shut the door.

It was almost dark. She found matches, and lighted the lamp, leaving it turned low, not to disturb Nat. But when she went softly toward the bunk, he was staring at her with his large, pale-colored eyes.

She spoke to him gently, and he said: "Who are you?" in a heavy, guttural voice.

"Your nurse."

Bewilderment and distrust apparently were confusing the sick brain. "Nurse! What nurse?"

"Yours. I am taking care of you."

"Taking care of me?" He seemed to consider this; then looked at her again, with a childish terror in his gaze: "You won't let her get at me?"

"No one shall hurt you," Juliet assured him, in a tranquil voice.

"That she cat! That she wildcat! She'd kill me, I reckon, if she dared. For Derry. She loves Derry."

His own utterance of the name seemed to excite him violently. "Derry! Where in —— *is* Derry?"

"Hush!" she soothed, measuring out a sedative. "He is not here."

"How do you know?" He was flushed now, and tried to toss about; his wound ached, and he groaned harshly.

"Hush! You must lie still. There is no one here but you and me. Now, will you take this?"

"How do you know? How do you know? How do you know?" he repeated with the rapid monotony of fever. "How do you know he ain't hidin' in the Under Trail? He might be within ten yards of us, and we'd never know."

"Take this; you must be quiet. That's right. There is no Under Trail. You were just dreaming, weren't you?"

"No Under Trail? No Under Trail? Who says there's no Under Trail? You come with me, and we'll steal up on him, before he knows it. Where's my gun? Curse him! Curse him for pulling so quick; I nearly had him! You'll come with me, won't you? And we'll catch him in the Under Trail!" He laughed crazily.

"Hush! Shut your eyes now, and we'll go and find him later," said Juliet.

But her heart beat hard. A vague notion was forming in her head. What did the man's ravings mean? Was there really an underground passage or tunnel through these untracked hills, a secret and hidden way

with which only the mountain people were familiar? She knew of the caves and subterranean waters of Virginia. She had even heard that the underground service had been a dramatic feature of the Civil War. But that there should be such a phenomenon close to her seemed well-nigh incredible.

"Try to sleep," she went on almost automatically. "Close your eyes, and be quiet. Hush! You shall do just whatever you like in a little while."

But Nat Mooney, now thoroughly light-headed, talked on, his odd, pale eyes burning bright with delirium: —

"A dozen paces to the left of the laurel clump. Not ten men know, and, once you make it, God Himself has to look twice to find you! And a clear way, high and broad, all the way to Crazy Run!"

Juliet started. "High and broad." "All the way to Crazy Run." So that was how Regis had been taken!

"When the boys come after him," incoherently muttered the man in the bunk, "tell 'em — you won't let — get away. Tell — Under Trail. No one knows. Promised Kitty — wouldn't tell — but—" He suddenly spoke loudly and intelligibly: "If I die, I want Derry Blake to swing for it! If I don't, I'll see to him myself!"

The spasmodic flash of strength and clarity died as swiftly as it had been kindled. The painful frown on his damp forehead relaxed. Under the influence of the quieting drug he slept again.

Juliet took advantage of his unconsciousness to deftly and gently dress his wound for the night. Not until that was done would she permit herself to speculate upon the strangeness of what he had hinted.

Just as she had finished, some one knocked lightly, and she opened the door to Craig Evarts. Mackanerny was with him, mounted, and Evarts was leading a rough mountain pony by the bridle.

"Miss Gray," he said quickly, "will you give me your message for the doctor? Mack and I are going over the Ridge to Battlebrook, and so round by Carkham."

"I found a pencil stub, and scribbled a report," Juliet told him. "Perhaps you'd better take that to Doctor Clement. The patient is delirious to-night, and I am rather anxious. What have you found out about Regis?"

"Absolutely nothing. But I shall, if there's any law and order to be had in this country. There's a half-hearted search being made, but the boys take very little interest. I can't make it out, unless, as I'm inclined to think, old Turley was right, and they don't want to find out anything that might incriminate their whisky dealer!"

"I've told ye," Mackanerny spoke up testily from the shadows, "that they're all standin' in with Blake, the lads are. 'Tis he has your horse, tak' my word for it!"

"Balderdash, Mack!" exclaimed Evarts, with obvious impatience. "Blake has too much sense to

hang around this neighborhood. He's jumped a lift on a freight long ago, and is beyond Charlottesville by this time."

"Then what are you going to do about the horse?"

"I'm going to get that fool sheriff back here, and send out the biggest search party this Ridge has ever had on it ——"

They were all startled to hear a hoarse voice from within, drunk with fever: —

"Is that the boys come for Derry? You'll get him, boys, you'll get him yet, if you'll just attend to me! It's twelve paces — I think it's twelve paces — or is it ten?"

"He's out of his head!" said Juliet, hurriedly. She was very white.

"All the way to Crazy Run — all the way to Crazy Run," chanted the harsh voice. "You can't miss it, boys; I tell you he's hidin' there. No one knows about it but —"

"I am really afraid you are exciting him by staying!" said Juliet, her voice curiously strained.

"But, by Jove!" exclaimed Evarts, leaning forward to look into the room, "there may be something in what he's saying, you know!"

"It sounds quite meaningless to me!" said Juliet, with an edge in her tone.

"I'm glad to hear it, mem!" said Mack, dryly, and the muscles of her throat tightened. The Scotchman suspected her of knowing something.

"He has been talking wildly for an hour," she said,

controlling herself steadily. "Naturally, as I am a stranger here, half the time I don't know to what he is referring."

"It's right in the side of the hill," Mooney was saying raucously. "You'd never know it was there, the trees grow so thick; and the way in is high and narrow, just like a great, big crack. And then it's a clear two miles, straight to Crazy Run."

"Crazy Run!" exclaimed Evarts. "Why, that's — How far is that, Mack?"

"Four miles, by our trails," said the foreman. "But I reckon, as the crow flies, or as the snake burrows, 'twad be less nor two."

The phrase caught the feverish man's fancy. "As the snake burrows," he repeated, with a mad giggle, "as the snake burrows — as the snake burrows! And she's one snake, and he's the other — Derry Blake's a snake, burrowing underground." His voice rose to a shriek: "Hang him, boys! Hang him — hang him!"

He sank into stupor again.

"Jove!" Craig Evarts said, "this is pretty important, you know, Mack!"

"Ay," said the other, briefly. "I've heard tell of an underground way through the hills, but I never thought for it to be used in our time, and I know naught of the thing mysel'."

Juliet motioned them to close the door, and they did so, continuing their talk in low tones outside.

She felt sick with apprehension. If they should

find the underground way that led to the Shutter on Crazy Run, they were almost certain to come upon Derry Blake. She buried her face in her hands, and tried to think.

Suddenly she roused herself, to get the report for the doctor. But when she went to the door to give it to Evarts, she found that the two men had gone on without it, after all. She could hear their voices in the distance.

The clouds were once more gathering, she saw, as she stood in the doorway. Another storm was pending. The whole mountain side was sighing under the bleak wind that swept it. Voices broke in on the loneliness; a group of workmen trudged by, going up to the other shack for supper. They had been working on the washout all day. They threw curious glances at her, but awe of the white uniform kept them duly respectful. In a moment they had passed, and she was once again left alone.

The wind made the lamp gutter badly, and she adjusted the rude tin reflector in such a way as to shield the flame. Putting her cloak about her, she went out upon the trail, and let the gusty air play upon her cheek. Grim and secret, the face of the mountain rose on one side of her; vague and terrible, the Gap opened menacingly upon the other. Where — if it did indeed exist — was the mysterious Under Trail? Her soul was wrung by the need of knowing, that she might in some manner warn Derry that his hiding place was in danger of discovery. "Twelve

paces to the left of the laurel clump — or was it ten?" But the whole range was plumaged with laurel.

She looked up to the darkening, purple-gray sky, and felt her eyes aching with the hot, unshed tears of anxiety and impotence.

Then, as though under a galvanic shock, her whole body stiffened and thrilled. Somewhere, close to her, yet muffled, a horse whinnied!

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIDDEN WAY

> "We trod the shadow of the downward hill;
> We past from light to dark. On the other side
> Is scoop'd a cavern and a mountain hall,
> Which none have fathom'd . . .
> The home of darkness. . . ."
>
> ALFRED TENNYSON.

"TRY to drink a little of this, please."

"Wh — what is it?"

"Milk — cold milk, and you are thirsty, aren't you?"

"Thirsty? Oh, yes — yes. I'm thirsty. Give me a drink. No, dammit, a real drink! Whisky! You won't let a man die for lack of a little whisky?"

"Wait. Here is something that will make you feel just as though you had had a real drink. It doesn't taste quite the same as whisky, but —"

"It — it'll make me feel — better? You promise?"

"Yes; I promise. Drink it. And then the milk —"

"Derry said I was drunk!"

"Did he? When was that?"

"Just now. Didn't you hear him? Or maybe it

was yesterday. I don't remember. I was nearly too quick for him, wasn't I?"

"Yes; nearly. Won't you shut your eyes now, and try to sleep a little?"

"Sleep! When you've got this thing diggin' into my shoulder!"

He labored under the resentful conviction that the bandages and dressings of his wound were maliciously applied instruments of torment.

"I'm so sorry it hurts you. Let me try to make it easier."

"No, curse you! Keep off! I'll kill Derry Blake by inches for this! I'll tell you: I've a fine notion. I'll set fire to the brush that fills the entrance, and smoke him out — smoke him out of the Under Trail!"

He laughed wildly and savagely.

"No one is in the Under Trail. No one at all. You are dreaming again."

"Maybe. I feel like I'd been dreamin' a long time — a long — long — time." His voice trailed off sleepily.

Suddenly, with the startling but sporadic precision of the somnambulist of the delirious patient, he said: "One blue fir, and three birches, and twenty feet of scrub oak leadin' into the laurel patch. And they'd all burn like hell, if they wasn't a rain!"

Juliet stood still, and looked at him for several minutes, without moving. Then with great deliberation, she walked out, and hailed a second gang of workmen who were tramping noisily by in the dusk.

"Are you working on Mr. Evarts' road?" she called.

The men stopped, but there was a moment's hesitation before a gruff voice said, "Yes, ma'am."

"Aren't you rather late knocking off work?" she said to make certain.

"Been huntin' for his blamed hoss!" explained another man, without enthusiasm and still more gruffly.

"Then you all know Nat Mooney?"

Variously keyed grunts answered her, but the assents were not supplemented by any queries concerning her patient's condition. Clearly they *did* know Nat Mooney, but were not much interested in him for all that.

Juliet set her lips.

"I am sure," she went on calmly, "that you will be glad to help me to-night. He is very ill, and cannot be left. I have been on duty for a long time, and I need some fresh air. I should like one of you to come in and sit with him, please, while I go for a little walk."

A pause. No one seemed keen to volunteer. The men stood awkwardly about, bulky shadows in the growing darkness, and appeared to be conferring among themselves, not by speech, but by furtive glances. It was evident that they were equally loath to consent or to flatly refuse.

"Come," said Juliet, pleasantly, but in a tone of unmistakable authority. "You don't want Mr. Evarts

to think that you aren't willing to do a simple act of kindness like this!"

One of the men spoke up.

"It's this way, ma'am," he said. "We don't none of us take much stock in Nat Mooney. We ain't partic'lar about fightin' rules, but Mooney drawed on Derry Blake while Blake's back was turned, an' we don't feel like coddlin' him none. We ain't even real set on his gettin' well. That's all, ma'am."

Juliet laughed outright — a warm, sympathetic laugh. She was frankly delighted with the sportsmanlike, though rather unchristian, spirit.

"Oh, if that's all!" she exclaimed. "You're quite right, I'm sure, and I should feel the same way in your place. But I'll put it to you the way it strikes me! If this man should die, they'll try to catch" — a second's pause — "your friend, and, if they catch him, they will hang him. It seems to me that we all" — she threw a friendly emphasis on the last two words — "*we* all want Nat Mooney to get well!"

There was another short pause, while this was duly weighed. Then the man who had spoken first said slowly: "If you put it that way, ma'am, I reckon we'd better draw lots, to settle which of us'll stay."

At that, a small man, standing back of the others, said nervously: "I — I guess if any one's to stay, I will. Me an' Nat Mooney ain't very lovin'-disposed to each other, but I've been a pal of Derry's since this road job started. And — and — I reckon I'll stay!"

Juliet started slightly, as she recognized sandy-haired little Ed, but neither he nor she betrayed the fact that they had met before.

She thanked him, bade the others a kindly good night, and even in her inward tumult felt amused to hear their earnest wishes that she should "take good care of that darned tramp, for Derry's sake!" They departed, and she and Ed entered the bunk house.

"How is he, anyhow?" the little man asked abruptly. "Not dead yet, I take it?"

"Hush! He has queer, sudden fits of consciousness, and hears things unexpectedly. He will probably die. Listen! Have you ever heard of the Under Trail?"

Ed's small, greenish eyes opened as wide as they could.

"Gee! Yes! Ain't never been in it myself, an' couldn't say rightly jes' where it is, but I know it's close hereabouts. Turley an' his pals use it when the county air gets too warm for 'em, or when the revenue officers call too frequent. There are a couple of old stills down there, I've heard tell. Old Dan leaves moonshine in there for some of his go-betweens to call for.

Juliet mused a moment; then she said brusquely: "Is there any sort of lantern about this shack?"

Ed rummaged in the back room, and produced one. In a few minutes it was filled and lighted. Juliet explained to the little man what he was to do if Nat should awake, and what he was to say if any one

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should come. Then, having satisfied herself that for the time being all was well with the patient, she went out, carrying the lantern, to hunt for the entrance to the Under Trail!

She went to the spot where she had been standing when she heard the horse whinny. Then she struck straight inward to the mountain side, walking through the close-crowding shrubbery which screened the rock wall. Once reached, she followed it slowly down the trail. Not only was her search unrewarded, but the scrub oaks and laurel gave way to sumach and tangles of wild grapes, and there was nothing resembling a blue fir or a birch tree to be seen.

She retraced her steps, and, reaching her original starting point, went on, upward this time. In a few minutes, she came to a looming slab of rock, set as though on end, which jutted out sharply from the side of the hill, and which forced her to walk far out to the left to skirt its ponderous and far-reaching base. When she had gone around it, she saw that the angle between the projection and the mother rock was filled, or rather choked, with low trees, some of them dry and leafless as though dead. One of them, she noticed, was a blue fir, a trifle taller than herself. She also fancied that she could catch the glimmer of pale birch bark among the thick, interlacing branches before her.

At sight of these landmarks, she would have pressed forward up the hill, were it not that she suddenly perceived that a laurel bush at her feet had recently been trampled!

She glanced about her, holding the lantern low, to examine the ground. Just beyond was a clear, open space, covered with short, slippery, dry grass and withered moss. To the left of it, the trail and the bunk-house light were dimly visible. Here at least was one way by which Regis might have come with little noise. But the daring of it — in broad daylight! They must have been singularly certain of speedily reaching a safe cover.

She turned to examine more closely the brush-filled rock angle. To her amazement and excitement, she found that several of the dead trees were loose, and were only held upright and in their place by being propped against the living ones, which were comparatively few. She put out a swift, nervous hand, and pulled one down; another, leaning against it, fell with it; and, as she lifted the lantern above her head to look, she beheld a high and narrow opening in the rock — an opening, as she instantly realized, just about broad enough for a horse to pass through. The black depth beyond it proclaimed it to be the entrance of a cave of some sort. Juliet had succeeded — she had found the Under Trail!

In some transition period of the smelted earth, the huge rock wall of the mountain had split mightily, leaving this black and jagged fissure, a monstrous rent in a granite fabric, through which one seemed to glimpse the deep recesses of the earth. Something awful and magnificent there was in this stone record of prehistoric upheavals; it brought Juliet suddenly

face to face with the colossal violence of nature, thrilled her with a sense of things primeval, evolutionary, relentless.

The lantern which she carried threw strange saffron lights upon the rock, and flickered eerily among the low, dark shrubs and the twisted, dwarfish trees. The wind was still, and the sky thickly overcast, with close-hanging folds of blue black clouds. Juliet caught her breath, oppressed alike by the heavy dampness of the night air and by the slow, hard pounding of her own blood.

A faint sound startled her, but it was only a passing stir of wind, a breath full of sadness, and the coming frost. It sighed down the wooded hillside, and was lost in the pervading hush. The Gap, barely visible now, steamed with a clammy gray mist. Moisture dripped from the trees about. A night bird flew past, the beat of its wings felt rather than heard.

Juliet raised her lantern, and swiftly and noiselessly entered the cave.

Inside, the ground dipped almost immediately downward in a steep, but not precipitous decline, rough with rocks. The way was still very narrow, and grew loftier as she penetrated farther, the space above seeming only less limitless than the heavens outside. The stone walls, slanting toward the center, and close-pressing, were slimy wet, and the ground was wet, too. The air, however, was remarkably fresh and sweet, and perceptibly warmer than above ground.

In the moist earth between the rocks at her feet, she could see the prints of a horse's hoofs, and it was clear that they had been newly made.

She walked steadily but cautiously, often raising her lantern to light her way. Suddenly the narrow path opened out sharply, and instead of one passageway she was confronted by three or four, branching out between natural rock pillars of varying size and roughness. The ground was now extremely uneven; on one side it seemed to rise steeply and abruptly toward the beetling upper walls of the cave; on the other the rocky archways appeared to give on pathless cavities.

Juliet picked up a small stone, and tossed it into one of these black spaces. She felt a little sick as she waited for it to strike bottom, and waited in vain.

It seemed to her that she stood close to the mysterious heart of the earth. For a moment she forgot Derry Blake and her errand, and thought only of the majesty and the mystery of eternal nature.

After a minute's pause, she went through the largest of the archways, up a path so steep that she slipped twice and started some little pebbles, which, with their attendant multiplying echoes, made an unconscionable racket in the silence.

There was a quick, loud sound close to her on the other side of the next turning in the passage. For now she seemed in a subterranean labyrinth, with arch upon arch leading to darkness, and a storm of infinitesimal echoes rapping about her head. The

echoes did indeed so distort, magnify, and change the direction of every noise, that it required a moment of reflection to make the girl decide that what she had heard was the violent trampling start of a frightened horse.

With a suppressed exclamation of excitement, she moved forward to investigate, and immediately became conscious of other human steps advancing to meet her in the passage. A light flashed in her eyes. She raised her lantern quickly, recoiling a step as she did so — and she and Derry Blake stood facing each other, their faces white and strained in the leaping glare.

There was a motionless, breathless, timeless minute that passed; then Derry, softly as though he feared to banish a wonderful and surprising dream, put his lantern down. His eyes were dark stars, his face illumined by a great emotion. Juliet seemed for the first time to see him as he really was. Her own glance could not leave his, and, as though she also moved and breathed in a vision, she felt him take her own light from her hand, and set it, too, down on the ground. Still neither of them spoke.

Their faces were now in shadow, and by an odd optical illusion everything seemed blotted out save their eyes. Like dim yet glowing fires, their looks met, and held, and fused.

Then Derry gave a low cry: —

"You!"

Too dizzy to see anything any longer, she closed her eyes. And then she felt his lips on hers.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE HEART OF THE HILLS

"O sovereign power of love! O grief! O balm! . . .
One kiss brings honey-dew from buried days,—
The woes of Troy, . . . Juliet leaning
Amid her window flowers, sighing. . . .
Hero's tears, the swoon of Imogen.
By that kiss, I vow an endless bliss,
An immortality of passion. . . ."

KEATS' *Endymion.*

LIKE all strong natures, Juliet's revulsion of feeling was no less violent than the impulse which had swept her away. Her anger against the man was the more fierce because it was but the reflex of her anger against herself.

"How dared you touch me!" she cried, and the fury of generations of women rang in her voice.

So vehement, so poignant was the cry, that any weak emotion, any ignoble hardihood, any spurious authority, must have been shattered by it. But Derry faced her, breathing quickly, but unabashed. His eyes met hers squarely; if there was passion in them, there was also, she thought, truth.

"I don't know," he said simply. "I don't know how I dared. But — thank God, I did!"

"You are *glad!*"

"Of course, I am glad."

"You have insulted me — humiliated me."

"Hush, girl! No, you don't mean that, not in a million years you don't! You know mighty well I haven't insulted you, nor yet humiliated you. A man doesn't do that to any one he —"

She cut in wildly: "You took advantage of — this — of my coming here — alone — of the time — and — and my helping you ——"

"Yes," said Derry, in a gentle tone. "I did. I took advantage of all those things. I reckon that's the way the flowers take advantage of the sun, to bloom. Things don't happen just right very often in this world, child; we've got to take 'em quick in both hands when the Lord gives us half a chance! I'm not a gentleman, you see, as you understand the word; I'm just a man who's had to take second best in pretty near everything in life. But this time it's the *best!* Do you understand, girl? It's the best that any one can have that I've got. I've got my — love for you."

The flame of Juliet's face slowly whitened, but she went breathlessly on: "You can't pretend to — love me — and yet show me that — that I can't — trust you."

His eyes were very soft through all their fire.

"Why can't you trust me? Because I kissed you?"

Derry looked splendidly handsome. Some effect

of light combined itself with the keen emotion of the hour to make him, in that wild and strange time and place, a figure of striking power and charm.

"I — I came to you — alone!" Juliet spoke chokingly, fighting the force and youth and vitality of the man.

"Yes. I've been thanking God for that already, you know." A sunny smile twitched at his lips. "Go on."

"I came" — she plunged on breathlessly — "because I didn't want you to be found — to be taken. I — "

"Yes."

"He — he is going to die. He is worse. And — you will be taken."

"Yes."

He would not help her, that was clear. She kept desperately to facts.

"I am afraid — He is delirious, and talks a great deal. I am afraid that he will tell — the others — how to find you. That was why I came."

"Did Nat put you onto this place?"

"Yes, of course. He chattered about trees and things, and I got the little man — you know —"

"Ed?"

"Yes. I got him to stay with the patient, and I hunted, and — and — I found it."

It was a lame little story. Her clear eyes looked at him defiantly, yet with some subtle appeal in them. The man was silent for a moment.

At last he said quietly: "I thought it was Kitty who had told you how to get here."

"Oh, she would never do that!" exclaimed the girl, impetuously.

"You mean she wouldn't trust you?"

"Not —" She stopped herself just in time. She had been going to say "with you." She flushed a little, as a glint of humor in his eye and the odd little slant of one eyebrow warned her that in his own mind he had finished her sentence only too accurately.

"Kitty's right clever sometimes," was all he said, however. He might have been copying Kitty's own enigmatic irrelevance.

"You are laughing!" said Juliet, suddenly.

Indignation throbbed again in her voice. Oh, the chaos of this strange night, the whirl of her head, the trouble of her heart, the confusion of all fixed standards and accustomed instincts!

"Am I?" said Derry. His eyes were brilliant.

"It — it is horrible to me that you should laugh!" said Juliet, almost with a sob in the words. "You do not seem to understand."

He shook his head.

"It's you who don't understand," he said serious enough now, though with a sort of undercurrent of tender cheerfulness running through the deep tone. "Why, child, about the best and finest thing in this world is laughter!"

"You think it is right to laugh at — everything!"

"No, not everything. Though, when you get

down to it, there's mighty few things that wouldn't be the better and the sweeter for a good laugh."

"Life and death, for instance!" she said with a kind of desperate scorn.

"Sure. Life and death. They both take a bit of pluck to face, and come easier if you laugh at 'em. And love. Love's a right serious business, yet the more you love, the more heart you can put into your laughing."

"You have killed a man — you have probably killed a man," said Juliet. "And you can talk about putting heart into your laughter! You may have to — to die for it yourself, and yet — I believe that you are happy!"

"Yes," answered the man. "I am happy. Sure I am. I love you. And I have kissed you. And when I — did that — I found out — something else. I couldn't have learned that except — from your lips."

His eyes, splendidly yet tenderly audacious, flashed to hers.

Juliet sat down, trembling, on a black ledge of rock.

"It is like a bad dream!" she whispered brokenly. "It is all unreal and terrible. I came here to help you. But everything in me revolts against what you have done, and most of all at what I have done in shielding you and in countenancing it!"

"Then why did you?" said Derry.

There was a minute of silence, so sudden that it

came like a blow. Juliet sat staring up at him, sharply conscious of the stillness of the cavern, the damp warmth that enveloped her, of a hundred minute and unimportant things that accompanied the pause.

"I couldn't — help myself," she said at last heavily.

"No," said Derry Blake. "That's it, you see. We can't either of us help ourselves. When a man and a woman are cut out for each other — why, it doesn't make any difference how they are fixed, nor what they do; it's there, shouting in them, as soon as they meet. If you and I hadn't happened to find each other here, it would just have been somewhere else, that's all."

"Yes," said Juliet, quietly. "It — I suppose it means — that. But to-night — please — I want to think and talk only of — your safety."

His face was deeply flushed, and his mouth quivered. Warm, tender, protecting, searching, humble, triumphant — his eyes met hers. Then he laughed, softly and gladly, like a boy.

"All right — ma'am," he said. "As a matter of fact, I reckon my safety's all fixed. I'll get out of here in a couple of hours, by way of the Shutter. You know about that?"

She nodded, following his words eagerly.

"There are other hiding places on Liberty Ridge," he went on; "plenty of others. This is the most comfortable in bad weather, but there's lots more, and they're safer just now, I guess! I can make out

well enough. I reckon, though, I'd better keep the horse underground, until I'm ready to clear out. What's the matter?"

Juliet had winced at his mention of the horse.

"Nothing. Only I—I hate to think of that part of it," she returned with averted eyes.

"What part of it?" His voice was gentle, but bewildered.

"The horse."

"Why? It's a great beauty, by the way, and no mistake! Why do you hate to think of the horse, girl?"

"Because—oh, don't you understand? Can't you see? He—he's not yours!"

He was silent for a moment, looking at her gravely, as though, for the first time, he were considering the matter from her point of view. At last he frowned, and nodded his head slowly.

"I see," he said. "You know I didn't take him, don't you?"

"But they took him because of you—for you," she rejoined. "And when you escape, it will be on him. You—"

"I see," he said again. "Do you want me—not take him?"

The question took away her breath. She talked blindly on, sparring for time. What in truth did she really want him to do?

"You—you will owe your safety to stolen property, don't you see?"

"Do you want me not to take him?" he repeated steadily.

The reiteration confused and disturbed her.

"I could forgive you for shooting the man," she said, breathing fast. "I could forgive you for everything — *everything!* But this — this cheapens things somehow; it lowers you. It hurts my heart to have you do such a —"

"Do you want me not to take him?" he asked for the third time. "For if you don't —"

Juliet dropped her head on her hands.

"No!" she cried in a muffled, painful tone. "I want you to take him — and be safe!"

"You — darling!" breathed Derry Blake, and stood silent for a space, looking down at her bent head.

"Don't you worry," he said at last. "I'm not going to take him. I meant to send him back from Charlottesville or Covington, anyway, but I reckon you're right about the whole thing. 'Twouldn't be playing a sporting game, quite, to get away on another fellow's horse. And I reckon about the best thing that's happened to me yet is your caring about — about my not doing a thing like that. Where was the horse when he was — taken?"

"Outside the bunk house."

He nodded meditatively. "Outside the bunk house. Sure. Then the chap he belongs to was inside?"

"Yes. Mr. Evarts."

"Evarts, eh? Do you know Evarts well?"

"I'm his aunt's nurse. He brought me to the Ridge when we heard some one had been hurt."

"He shouldn't have done that!" There was a proprietary touch of displeasure in the voice, which melted swiftly to tenderness: "I'm mighty glad he did!"

"He didn't want to bring me —"

"I should say not! A gang of men like this, half drunk, not one of us fit to black your shoes —"

She could hardly refrain from laughing at him.

"Please don't be so annoyed about it," she said. "It wasn't Mr. Evarts' fault. I wanted to come."

"I bet you did. Have you always been like that? Wanting to be in the thick of everything — plumb in front of the fighting?"

"I think I have, rather."

His mind harked back.

"His aunt's nurse. Do you know him well?"

"You asked that before. I haven't known him very long. He's been very kind to me."

Derry considered this answer, and chose to be dissatisfied with it.

"Is he in love with you?" he demanded with some shrewdness.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Juliet, impatiently, but to her rage she felt her cheek burn.

"I see," said Derry, coolly. "He is. Of course, in that case, I can't take the man's horse, anyway!"

She gasped, opening her eyes wide at the singular ethics — or was it etiquette? — of this. But as

usual, he permitted no discussion of points which in his own mind he had settled.

"Don't you worry," he said; "you'll see; it'll be all right. And now you'll have to go, I reckon."

Juliet started up from the ledge where she had been crouching. As she did so, something fluttered from her dress to the ground — a small square of paper, scribbled in pencil, and folded small. Derry picked it up.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "It's my report for the doctor!"

"You don't mind my looking at it?"

"Oh, no. If you know anything about illness, you'll see that he is very low."

Derry glanced through the report, stooping toward the lantern light.

"Poor devil!" was his comment. "I'm sure sorry for him." Then: "How'll you get this to the doctor?"

"I can't now. Mr. Evarts was just about to take it, when —" She hesitated.

"I see. When his horse got sneaked and stalled him off. Of course."

He did not give the paper back, but held it, seeming to consider it and something it had suggested to him.

"Do you know," he said abruptly, glancing up from the scribbled signature, "I never knew your name before. 'Juliet!' 'Juliet Gray!'"

"I had forgotten you didn't know it!" she exclaimed wonderingly. "How strange—how very, very

strange. My mother spent her honeymoon in Verona. She always loved it."

"Juliet? She was that Italian girl, wasn't she, who loved some one a lot, and took big chances because of him?"

Juliet nodded, smiling involuntarily at this elementary description of the immortal daughter of Capulet.

"I read that book once," he proceeded reminiscently. "I don't remember where. It's a fine book with a good scrap in it. 'Juliet Gray.' I don't reckon you know my name, either, do you?"

"Yes. It is — Blake." She could not say why she left out the "Derry."

"That's right. Derrick Blake. Seems mighty wonderful that we should have known each other — like we have, without names to help out. And yet — why should it be so wonderful? We aren't names; we're a man and a woman. I think your name's right sweet — 'Juliet' — but when I think of you, I shan't think of you as 'Juliet.'"

"I — I am going now," whispered Juliet, fearing something in his voice and eyes.

"I'll go with you to the entrance," he said at once, and put the paper in his pocket.

She hardly noticed the action in concern for the words. "Oh, you must be careful! I wish you would let me go alone!"

But he would go with her nearly to the door of the cavern. The passageway back seemed stranger than

ever with him beside her. For the first time she felt really oppressed by the closeness and heaviness of the air. It seemed as though she never, never would get out into the living upper world again. Terror of the unknown combined with terror, active and deep, for him, and she trembled as she walked.

Once she said: "It is so hot here."

And he replied: "The underground springs."

She remembered that she was in the Hot Springs region, and the thought of the proximity of these naturally heated waters of the inner earth increased her nervousness. She felt close, too close to the terrible and huge forces of the world. She was thankful when a fresher breath of air told her that they were nearing the entrance.

There she made him stop, and he put her lantern into her hand with a gentle gesture and a radiant look.

"I shall not kiss you again," he said. "That's to show you that I love you. And I shall not thank you for coming; that's to show you that I know you love me!"

"Good-by!" she gasped. "Oh, go back — please go back!"

"Good-by — my girl."

There was an indescribable caress in the words.

Then she went on, and out, alone. It was blowing harder now, and the air felt sharply cold upon her fevered face. She began replacing the brush at the entrance with shaking hands, pausing often to listen.

But she was so excited that she was more mechanically than intelligently vigilant, and it was not until she had straightened up, and taken her lantern, preparatory to regaining the trail, that she saw a dark figure standing motionless ten feet away.

It was Kitty Turley, and she was looking at Juliet, with great eyes filled with an immeasurable and destructive hate.

CHAPTER X

OPEN WAR

"... Her heart waxed hot, and every word
Thereon seemed graven and printed in her thought
As lines with fire and molten iron wrought.
And hard within her heavy heart she cursed
Both, and her life was turned to fiery thirst,
For only in hope of evil was her life."

A. C. SWINBURNE.

JULIET recovered herself sharply, and walked straight to the shack. And Kitty went with her like a shadow.

When the nurse raised the latch, and pushed open the door, the small, dark girl, with an imperative gesture, entered, too. Juliet did not try to prevent her. Both women were consciously and voluntarily exercising their highest degree of personal force — will power, self-control, every element that goes to the command of such a situation as this. Both realized that, critical as the moment was, it would not be brains now that counted, nor any trick of superiority, bred or acquired. It would not even be diplomacy nor feminine lure; it would be a matter of authority and individual strength, and these alone. One of these two women must eventually become subservient to the other, and that they recognized the

fact was proclaimed by a steady coolness and composure between them — the subtle comradeship of enmity.

They walked side by side, without a word, into the dim and sordid bunk-house room, and Ed gaped in astonishment to see them standing there together, so pale and self-contained, so oddly respectful of each other.

With an abrupt gesture, as though putting something aside for the nonce, Juliet went to her patient. Nat was still in a deep stupor; his pulse was bad. No, he had not spoken nor moved, the sandy little man told her. How long had she been gone? Less than two hours; no one had been by.

To Juliet it was a shock to find that her adventure had lasted so short a time. Many years of less poignant experience had been crowded into that brief space — how strange that there had been but one hundred and twenty minutes of it all told!

Dismissed with a summary courtesy that startled him, so unlike it was to the slower and yet blunter methods of his kind, Ed departed, vaguely subdued and admiring; also, it must be said, a shade apprehensive of coming tempests. He had some reason to be. When the door shut on him, Juliet wheeled on the other girl, as though something proud and sure in her craved the opening of the attack.

"Well?" she said swiftly — almost gayly.

Kitty began to breathe quickly.

"You have seen him," she said. It was a state-

ment, not a question, and her eyes were like coals, red hot.

"Yes."

Kitty was silent for a moment; it seemed as though she were steadying and clearing her mind before answering. Then: "How did you know he was in the — Under Trail?"

Juliet glanced to the bunk, and back.

"From what *he* said when he was delirious," she explained simply.

"Nat didn't know."

"He knew about the Under Trail," Juliet reminded her. "And you had spoken of a cave and the Shutter —"

"You put two and two together?"

"Yes, and I wanted to warn him."

Both women were absolutely and carefully polite; they were not wasting ammunition on preliminaries.

"Nat was talking too much?" said Kitty.

"Yes."

Kitty considered Juliet and the situation for a full minute. When she spoke, it was in a new voice: —

"Then — you love him?"

"Listen, Miss Turley," said Juliet, very quietly. "There are a great number of things which should never be put into words — not from cowardice, but from wisdom. Whether I love him or not does not enter into this thing at all. I am sufficiently interested in him to wish him to escape safely; we must let it go at that."

"But," said Kitty, just as quietly, "I shall not let it go at that."

Juliet shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing.

"You won't tell me anything?" said Kitty.

"What is there to tell?"

"You saw him." Suddenly the care and preparedness of her speech broke sharply and rather pitifully. "Is he — all right?"

"Yes."

"Does the signal stand?"

Juliet started in a momentary bewilderment. "The signal?" she repeated vaguely.

"Yes, the signal — on Sunday. White — or red."

Juliet colored slowly to her hair.

"We — we didn't speak of the signal at all," she said in a low tone.

"What did you speak of?" demanded Kitty, looking at her very hard.

"I suppose it stands," the other girl said hastily.

But Kitty was inexorable. "What did you speak of?" Then, as Juliet caught her breath before answering, the mellow Southern voice grew edged and bitter with anguish: "Oh, you love each other! You love each other! It was of yourselves you spoke!"

"Hush — you will wake the patient," interrupted Juliet, uneasily. But Kitty's low, yet strident wail went on: —

"It was of yourselves you talked down there!"

"Miss Turley — he is moving; if you don't want to do him real harm, once more —"

"What do I care for that now? I wanted him to live so that Derry could get off. But now I'd rather — I'd rather he were hanged!"

"Miss Turley — hush! You don't mean it."

"Don't I? I don't believe you really know that I do mean it! I reckon you're a civilized woman, and can't understand that; can't understand that I'd rather he were dead, or in prison for life, than — with you!"

"Hush! You are horrible!"

"Yes, I am horrible. People *are* horrible, when they love and when they hate — the way I do. I reckon you think things are all solemn and beautiful, up in the air. They aren't! They're wicked, and hot, and bloody — as hell!"

"Keep still!" panted Juliet. "I know you hate me, and would like to harm me. You needn't say any more about it. Believe me, I am not in the least afraid of you."

"Then you are a fool," Kitty said. "You ought to be afraid of me."

"You may hate me just as much as you like," said Juliet. "You may do your best to make me suffer. But you shan't injure a man I'm looking out for. Now go!"

"And suppose," said Kitty, "it's Derry's safety I want, after all?"

Juliet spoke up scornfully: "I imagine Derry can look out for himself."

There was a short, tense pause.

"I love him!" said Kitty, a little wildly. "You are cold as ice, and don't understand, but — I love him! And he loved me till you came!"

"Loved you?"

"Ah, you don't believe it! But he did — he did! He loved me. We used to wander all over the Ridge together, and — he kissed me! Yes, he kissed me, and told me that he loved me!"

"You must not tell me — that!" said Juliet, pale and shrinking.

"Why not?"

"I don't want you to."

"You mean," blurted Kitty, mockingly, "that you don't like to think that he kissed another woman."

"Hush!" Juliet spoke strangely, but this time Kitty listened. "Don't you understand that — if I listen to you — I am being disloyal to — him?"

There was a deep yet sudden silence.

"So it's like that!" whispered Kitty Turley, subdued. "You've come to it already; I mean, to feel it is — disloyal. Yes; I begin to understand. I thought you were — cold!"

"Please!" implored Juliet. "Please don't be so bitter! I — I am very unhappy myself."

Kitty, in a low, tense voice, chose to set herself against any merciful instinct.

"Why should you be unhappy? You know that he — cares! I — I reckon he does. Of course, I know it wasn't the real thing with me, but it — it was good enough. He'd come back to me, too, if it weren't

for you. That's the sort of man he is. You think he's all for the high, uplifted, ideal business; well, I don't deny that's one side of him — a side I could never touch. But he liked to make love to me, and he would again! Let's talk sense a moment, if we can. If he gets" — Kitty Turley seemed to weigh her words advisedly — "if he gets the — white signal" — she waited a second, then she faced Juliet — "he's coming to you, isn't he?"

"He has said so." Would the girl never stop her inquisition?

"Yes. And it is *I* that have to give him that signal, isn't it?"

Quickly and curiously, Juliet's heart went out to her. "I am sorry. Oh, I am so sorry."

"Don't be sorry for me!" said Kitty. "Don't you realize what a chance you're putting into my hands? What a weapon?"

"You don't mean —" Juliet stumbled over the new idea. "You wouldn't give him the wrong signal?"

"Ah!" said Kitty, laughing strangely. "I'm going home — to get out my white Sunday dress, and press it nicely. But there's a bright red waist besides. Maybe I'll get that ready to wear, too."

"The man may get well yet!" said Juliet, almost defiantly.

"He?" said Kitty, indifferently. "Oh, I don't care whether he gets well or not. I was thinking — I was thinking — what I'd wear!"

"You were thinking," said Juliet, deliberately, "that,

even if he were out of danger — you would wear — red!"

"I haven't decided," remarked Kitty Turley, lazily. "There's only one thing clear in my mind just now. I hate you. I wish — oh, I really do wish that I were able to hurt you, very much!"

Tossing, turning; tossing, turning; Nat Mooney twisted his whole aching length toward a voice that was thrusting itself into his heart.

"Kitty!" he groaned hoarsely. "That was Kitty talkin'!" He frowned, and tried to lift himself.

Kitty herself swooped upon him, with a strange, set look about her exquisite lips.

"Nat!" she purred. "Look at me! It's Kitty! You know me?"

"My Kitty!" He plucked at her shadow, and his hungry gaze strained to her.

"Yes — yours!" Her voice was of a slow yet calculated softness. "Nat! Will you do something for me?"

"Anythin' — darlin'!"

His eyes were rapt and unreasoning.

"Look at this woman!" Kitty spoke in a hard, clear voice, and she pointed definitely at Juliet Gray. "That one — yes, the one in white. I hate her! And she hates me."

Juliet looked at her, and shrugged her shoulders.

Nat Mooney looked vaguely troubled.

"She — she's kind to me," he ventured doubtfully.

"Never mind!" said Kitty, viciously. "I hate

her — that's enough! When you get well, Nat, always remember that I hate her, and that I shall be glad and grateful for every bad thing that happens to her!"

Juliet walked to the door, and threw it open. Her eyes were blazing.

"The door is open," she said a little breathlessly. "Will you go, please?"

Kitty laughed in her face as she passed her.

"He will never forget," she said. "You will have to look out for yourself — even if he does get well. He is a rotten bad enemy to have."

Juliet looked at her with a clear glance, and a grave shadow about her mouth. The headlong malevolence of the girl jarred her to the depths of her nature.

"That was a wicked thing to do, Miss Turley," she said with simplicity.

Kitty paused for a swift, poised second at the door, before she fled.

"I've always been wicked," she agreed. "You've seen dad, haven't you? Good night!"

CHAPTER XI

CHICKEN SAM'S DEVIL

> The ways of a man with a maid be strange, yet simple and tame
> To the ways of a man with a horse. . . ."
>
> RUDYARD KIPLING.

CLOUDS, with sharp, silver edges, were scudding across a chill, moonlit sky. Many stars were out; the night was brilliant, gusty, and alive. Every leaf on every tree seemed to move to a secret cadence. The mountain world was lying awake under the stars.

"Witches! There are witches and hobgoblins abroad," said Juliet to herself, with a shiver. "What a queer night!"

She went in to prepare nourishment for the wounded man, and to wait for the morning. It was long in coming. She tried sitting as easily as might be, and leaned back against the wall, to rest, but her mind whirled busily. Even when not indulging in conscious thought, she felt a constant restlessness of brain and spirit, a steady thrilling of the nerve centers of her life. The working of the universe was suddenly violent and complex; the conservative earth was spinning faster through space than was its wont and custom.

Just at dawn, Juliet, still sitting up, dropped into the light, open-eared slumber on which night watchers must depend. From this she was aroused by the sound of a horse coming along the trail.

Springing up, she went quickly to the door, and was obliged to rub her eyes before the double surprise that greeted her. Hitched precisely where he had been the afternoon before stood Regis, beautiful and satin-coated, stamping lightly on the turf, and snuffing the morning wind.

And, as if this were not enough, riding down the trail was Doctor Clement!

"How — how —" she stammered.

"How did I get here?" asked the good doctor, smiling ruddily from under the brim of a most disreputable old hat.

"Yes — that, too. But how did he get here?"

She glanced blankly from the horse on which the doctor was riding to the one hitched by her door.

"Don't know anything about Regis — it is Evarts' horse, isn't it? But I came in answer to that note of yours."

Juliet stared at him, and then the color began to pour into her face. Derry had taken the note himself! In some miraculous way, Derry had gotten her report to the doctor's hands!

She cleared her mind imperiously to confer professionally with Doctor Clement while the two horses bunted at each other with inquiring noses. Doctor and nurse, they were of one mind as to the defer-

ring of explanations. This gray-dawn colloquy under the very guns of the enemy, death, sobered Juliet to a sense of big, grave issues. A stolen horse, a cave, a few lies, a little jealousy — how insignificant seemed these properties in the large and solemn scheme of living and dying!

Nevertheless, when the case had been reported and discussed, and the doctor's directions had been given and noted, the girl followed him to the doorway, with a racing pulse and a tentative question. How— she wanted to know, very hesitatingly — had the doctor gotten that note?

He was brisk and brusque, indeed almost merry, despite his concern for his case and the long and cheerless rides, behind and ahead of him that morning. Brilliant sunlight, he was glad to see, was now pouring in golden cataracts down the trail.

"Ah, to be sure — that note! Really, Miss Gray, you choose some odd messengers."

She was in an agony of impatience and uncertainty before the amused scrutiny of his twinkling eyes.

"Do tell me about it," she parried. But there was no keeping the eagerness out of her tone.

"It was this way," he proceeded, taking a blunt and evident relish in the recital. "Chicken Sam. Do you know Chicken?"

"No!" She bubbled over with laughter at the name.

"Oh, well, you wouldn't. He's a product of the hills here — a very usual type of negro that robs

henroosts. That may be one reason for the name; the other is that he has a father also called Sam. The old one is Rooster Sam, you see. Eh?

For Juliet had laughed out. In a moment the doctor laughed, too — rather a rasping chuckle, for he suffered from sore throat in the damps of the mountain dawn.

"I'd gotten used to the two Sams, Rooster and Chicken, and forgotten that they might have humorous possibilities for a newcomer. Well, anyway, Chicken lives on the other side of this Ridge, halfway down the mountain overlooking the highroad that runs between Carkham and Battlebrook. He's a low-down nigger, you understand, and scared green of voodoo, obi, and that sort of truck."

"You mean witchcraft, don't you?" interjected Juliet, mystified, for she had yet to apprehend the deep wells of superstition undefiled that spring in the Southern hills.

"Magic — black magic," said the doctor, tersely. "Turning people into toads, drying up cows — there aren't many cows in this neighborhood, so it's bad business when they go dry — cutting open hens and rabbits, and —

Juliet made a horrified and incredulous sound, and he glanced at her as though surprised.

"Certainly!" he said, answering her expression. "They are very strong for sacrifices. I don't positively know of their having burned any babies recently, but — Now, don't turn green, Miss Gray!"

"Oh, you are laughing at me!" she exclaimed relieved, but resentful.

"Not a bit of it. We are firm believers of voodoo hereabouts, and have fits at the sight of the Evil Eye, and are on nodding acquaintance with bogies, and vampires, and ghosts, and any number of pretty little familiars like that! Chicken Sam believes in all the standard and accepted horrors, and in a few more of his own creation, for he drinks nigger gin, and has a very guilty and very imaginative conscience — inflamed by local camp meetings.

"His story is that he was shooting, or trying to shoot, a belated possum, near Crazy Run — one of our mountain streams — a little after midnight last night. It was bright moonlight, according to his report, though at times the clouds came up 'very dark and threatening like.' All picturesque touches are his! Suddenly, according to his account, he heard a terrific noise of trampling hoofs, and out of the side of the hill rode the devil!"

Doctor Clement paused impressively. Clearly he found entertainment in the tale, even while not crediting it himself.

"Do go on; it's quite thrilling!"

Juliet laughed as she spoke, but her heart throbbed. "Out of the side of the hill —"

"The devil," went on Doctor Clement, "was, it seems, a black and gigantic monster, mounted on a snorting charger that was breathing flame. When I asked Chicken for details concerning His Satanic

Highness, he became incoherent, only insisting that his face was as black as any nigger's, his eyes like burning coals, and that he spoke unto him in a hollow, grave tone."

"How absurd!" Juliet was frankly at sea now. Her eyes, however, were shining with interest.

"Dear me — you're a splendid listener, Miss Gray! I don't know when I've had so good an audience. Well, then, Chicken declares that the monster began solemnly to remind him of some thousand and one sins — which, by the by, the darky makes no pretense of denying — and told him that only in one way could he avoid being voodooed into the most haunting and horrible ill luck. I believe his bones were to turn to axle grease, and his head sprout buck's horns — something spectacular of that sort."

"Lovely!" Juliet's voice was frankly joyous.

"Chicken Sam blubbered a sort of blasphemous confession, kneeling in the frost, and the devil proceeded to give him a charm in the shape of a small piece of paper."

The doctor paused, and peered at her.

"Charm?" repeated Juliet.

"A charm to avert the calamities hanging about his head. He was to take it to the nearest doctor, who, on receipt of it, and after hearing his story, would give him some medicine.

"Chicken Sam inquired as to the character of the medicine, but the devil said that it could safely be left to any doctor he happened to find. After the oracle,

or the devil, had spoken, he vanished into the side of the hill, and the echo of the horse's hoofs died away.

"Chicken is a thief and a coward, but he believes in the devil, and he is the most perfectly literal person I have ever met. When he had recovered from the effects of his fright, he brought the magic paper straight to me, I being the only doctor within ten miles of him. He rang me up at four o'clock this morning to do it! Of course, it was your note, Miss Gray. Now, how did he get it? You asked me that question, and, as I am totally unable to answer it in a way that *I* find satisfactory, suppose you tell me?"

"I don't know — truly I don't know, Doctor Clement!" Juliet laughed once again, quite girlishly, in the cool morning air. "I — I lost that paper, myself. Some one — some one must have picked it up."

The doctor regarded her keenly, but she was looking into space, with a little smile on her lips.

"H'm!" was all he said.

"Doctor" — she turned to him swiftly — "did you give Chicken Sam his medicine?"

"Sure I did!" The doctor grinned amiably, and rammed his hat harder down on his rough head. "I gave him a big drink of whisky, madam. And he seemed to believe that it would or could cure him of every ill on earth. I guess," added the doctor, gathering up his reins, "that he will go and hunt up some more devils now, with an eye to the result."

When he had settled himself complainingly in his saddle, he bethought himself that this girl had failed to give him an altogether clear account.

"So you don't know who Chicken Sam's devil might be?" he said searchingly.

Juliet's eyes danced.

"Of course I don't!" she exclaimed. "Unless it was Regis here, who has been out all night himself!"

The doctor shook his head at her — perhaps at her inconsequence or perhaps at something else. There was just a hint of kindly warning in his careless parting: —

"Good-by, Miss Gray. We must get that patient of ours well just as soon as possible. Liberty Ridge is no place for civilized girls."

When he had ridden away, he recollected that, though she had said good-by to him soberly, her eyes still sparkled with a light which was brighter than that of the morning sun.

CHAPTER XII

THE DAY OF THE SIGNAL

"She, face, form, bearing, one superb composure" . . .
ROBERT BROWNING.

SUNDAY was unusually warm for the season.

Although the mountains of Virginia seldom have a true Indian summer, this crucial day could boast a belated warmth which lay lightly upon Liberty Ridge, and softened rocks and precipices with a touch as of dreams. Sun glistened on the radiant reaches of sumach and mountain laurel that covered Purple Mountain, striking out tones of flame and russet, Venetian red and pale gold, and in the Major's Gap shimmered a tender bluish tint — a haze that, even before one's eyes, deepened to violet, and waned to silver. The farther hills, dim and lovely, were just sufficiently veiled to offer the lure and promise of the beautiful unknown.

A wistful hope seemed to cling to the still, autumnal mountains. Gracious yet pathetic, they waited in their too splendid finery for the gray hour so soon to come. So do men make merry upon the eve of national mourning, and so does a woman put on her richest dress for her last appearance before the world.

Nat Mooney was out of danger.

Doctor Clement said so cheerily, with much heartiness and good will, praising Juliet for her nursing and pluck, and encouraging Nat in the rude yet kindly manner which these mountain fellows liked. But long before the doctor confirmed her opinion, Juliet had felt certain. She knew that, by some power not very short of the miraculous, she had brought the man through. She had felt from the first that, if human care could do this thing, it would be given to her to do.

Well, she had done it! So it happened that she received the doctor's genial verdict with a queer, white smile, and, moving a little stiffly, tore up her temperature chart.

The physician watched her with some curiosity. He knew that she had torn up the chart, not because she was particularly conscious of being through with it, but because she had to do something, at that moment, and because that small act seemed to her indefinitely symbolic, and in its way final. From the first, Doctor Clement had suspected that the very capable nurse had some obscure and abnormal interest in the case.

He made no comment, however. He was so busy a man that he had learned how to wait for developments instead of hurrying them. He found that in the long run it saved time.

Nat Mooney was not a pleasant convalescent. He glowered and grumbled, and he brooded over his wound and the donor of it, until Doctor Clement

told him with chaffing sharpness that he was "getting hipped"!

As for Juliet Gray, she had grown so used to his complaints and vituperations that she was no longer even passingly annoyed by them. She abated nothing of her conscientious care, but, as the man mended, she withdrew something of that nervous energy with which she had been feeding his weakness. As a result, her patient considered her cold and unsympathetic.

That she had saved his life mattered little in the entirely elementary workings of Nat's mental and moral being. In fact, at times she surprised in his disagreeable light eyes an odd look of hate, which startled her somewhat, and made her wonder secretly if Kitty Turley's poisonous seeds had really taken root in that crude intelligence. It would be a curious and interesting thing, she reflected, a shade contemptuously, if her almost superhuman care of Nat had merely resulted in making of him another enemy.

But, for that matter, had there been a single incident that had occurred since she came to Liberty Ridge, which had been other than curious and interesting? Curious — no, unheard of! Interesting — no, wonderful past belief! She closed her eyes, and remembered the Under Trail and Derry smiling at her in the lantern light.

Kitty had not been near the shack since that open declaration of war, two nights before. Juliet wondered whether she had taken pains to inform herself,

from Ed or any of the other men, concerning Nat's improvement. For help in caring for the patient, and for provisions and small comforts, the nurse had been obliged to depend upon Ed and Mackanerny — always indirectly suspicious of her, she felt — and upon Evarts' visits.

The road was mended now, and the young man rode up every day on his mysteriously regained saddle horse. He had, by the by, been absurdly reluctant to give up agitating the countryside concerning Regis' disappearance. Even when the horse was in his hands once more, he fretted and harped on the inexplicable episode until he came very close to making himself ridiculous. These littlenesses in him tried Juliet, and made her understand why he was so unpopular with his workmen. He would be a dreadful man to live with, she thought — the sort who was quite capable of a great love and of commensurately great sacrifices for it, but who would probably obscure both love and sacrifice in a cloud of microscopic, nagging annoyances and trivialities. She recalled that his sister Louise had a notoriously fretful temper, and wondered if it were a cause or an effect!

Something else she wondered — whether perhaps her own standards were not changing; whether her new acquaintance with large issues and crucial events had not given her a fresh and extended outlook upon both things and people, schooled her to a shrewder and broader judgment. She found, in truth, that she now demanded new qualities in men, new elements

in life. Something of the wild freedom of Liberty Ridge had gotten into her blood, and hereafter she knew well that she would ask for the savor of wild herbs and the chill of mountain dews in the air her spirit breathed.

When the doctor had gone that Sunday morning, Juliet said pleasantly to her surly patient that she was going out.

The muttered response gave her to understand that he was glad to get rid of her, so she put a cup of cold broth within easy reach of him, and started out with the step of some one who has a fixed destination to reach in as short a time as possible.

It was so warm that she did not wear her cloak, but carried it over her arm. Ed, on his way down to the foreman's house, saw the straight young figure in spotless white, and thought humbly that she looked like "a angel," with the sun on her gold hair. She had for two days dispensed with the cap, but the Evarts' people had kept her supplied with snowy uniforms from Evartston. She had her passion, like all good nurses, for being immaculately turned out.

She stopped Ed to ask him a brief direction. Then she went on, branching off from the main trail very shortly, and taking a narrower and rougher path, which she recognized as being the one upon which she had first met Derry. This she followed, as straightly and as quickly as energetic walking and an ascending sun could speed her, on and up to Dan Turley's house.

She had never been there before, but had no diffi-

culty in finding it. There were few dwellings anywhere on Liberty Ridge, and none, save the workmen's shacks, so high up the mountain side as this. She said to herself, as she hastened on, that the Turleys' cottage would have drawn her like a magnet, even without specified directions.

Yes, it was there before her. Low and grim, a gray wild beast couchant, it crouched among the rocks and pines and scraggy trees, and turned a blank, unseeing visage to the rare passer-by. The windows were fitted with heavy wooden shutters, weather-beaten to the same purplish silver as the rest of the unstained house, and the shutters were closed. So was the door.

A gaunt dog on a rusty chain bayed at her savagely when she approached. Otherwise she was not welcomed, nor was her coming taken account of in any way that she could mark.

After she had knocked in vain twice, she opened the door, and walked in.

She was genuinely surprised at the interior of the place. Large and low, the building, while utterly lacking in finish or beauty, promised something in the way of comfort, a promise which was signally unfulfilled. Somehow, too, in a house where there was a woman, she had expected some sign of the home-making instinct — an instinct which reaches, as a rule, to the nesting birds and the field mice. The cannibal lady who hangs her enemies' bones over the fireplace, and the factory girl who covers her hall-

room walls with pages from the illustrated supplements, are stirred by precisely the same impulse toward interior decoration.

But the Turley house was bare and cheerless. It was well built and sufficiently roomy, much better and more nearly weatherproof than the majority of mountain cabins, and Juliet noted a handsome stone fireplace, and an oak settle, which would have tempted an antiquary. The woodwork was dark and solid looking; the doors and windows well calculated to withstand the bleak mountain winters.

There were a few skins hanging on nails in a corner. It was characteristic of the spirit of the house, that they were not spread upon the bare floor. A rack of guns, a shelf of bottles and demijohns, a long, dull-colored dresser littered with heterogeneous stuff that ranged from tobacco tins to road maps, a heavy table in the middle of the room; such were the furnishings of Dan Turley's house.

As Juliet stood staring about her in wonder, an inner door opened, and old Turley himself, blear-eyed and unkempt as though just aroused from sleep, appeared on the threshold. His shaggy gray hair was in disorder, his rough and dirty shirt was open at the throat, and indeed he was in all ways a hideous figure as he stood there, eyeing her in peering yet crafty fashion from under his heavy brows.

A sense, very light and subtle, touched Juliet — a sense, not of fear, but of danger, which is quite different and distinct. She knew intuitively that no one

was entirely safe with that terrible old man, but she did not feel afraid of him. She merely felt alert and distrustful and subconsciously grateful to the instinct that had warned her.

"Good morning," she said clearly. "Is your daughter at home?"

The old man still stared at her, and for a moment appeared undetermined as to whether or not he should answer her at all. At last he mumbled indistinctly: "Kitty — Kitty? Ah don' know nothin' 'bout Kitty."

"Is she out?" demanded Juliet, putting her question differently.

Old Turley slouched forward into the room. He was, Juliet saw now, unusually tall, much taller than he had appeared when she had first seen him outside the bunk-house door three days ago.

"You-all's the nursin' gyurl, ain't yo'?" he remarked with what he may have intended to be a smile.

"Yes," said Juliet, smiling in her turn, though as a matter of fact she would far rather have frowned in her disgust of the evil old face before her.

"An' yo' wan' to see mah darter?"

"Yes," she said again, wishing that he would not peer like that. Those old eyes were wickeder than the eyes of any young man could be; the effect was uncanny. With a shock, she appreciated the truth that sinister age is infinitely more ghastly than depraved youth.

"What's you-all wantin' to see Kitty 'bout?" demanded Dan Turley.

Juliet was impulsively, perhaps for the minute unwisely, direct.

"I want to see her about the signal," she said boldly. "The signal which it was agreed she would give — to-day."

Dan looked at her for a moment or two before he said, "Kitty ain't a-goin' to give no signal to-day."

"Nonsense!" said Juliet. "It's out of the question for her to go back on it now. Mr. Turley, I'm sure you are mistaken. If I could just see your daughter —"

"Kitty ain't a-goin' to give no signal," repeated Turley, stubbornly. He added: "Kitty an' me, we're done with that no-'count, good-for-nothin', damn fool —"

"Oh, come, come!" she interrupted, trying to speak lightly. "I don't know whom you are talking of, Mr. Turley, but —"

"It's Blake Ah'm a-talkin' 'bout!" said Turley, with a lowering look. Juliet's memory flashed back to Kitty's thunderous little face. It was clear whence she derived her unhallowed temper and genius for hatred. "It's Derry Blake Ah'm a-talkin' 'bout," growled the harsh and angry old voice. "He's made mah Kitty feel bad, an' Ah curse him. Ah curse him."

"Oh, hush!" cried Juliet, faintly. This horrible old creature seemed somehow invested with the power

to curse, and curse effectually. Surely one such as he must be on calling terms with the devil and his works.

"Shut up, dad!" said a slow, musical voice from behind Juliet.

She turned quickly, and saw Kitty, leaning against the jamb of the front door.

She was dressed in a rough skirt and blouse, and carried a brace of freshly killed hares slung over her shoulder. Her small, brown hand was curved around the muzzle of a rifle, which rested, butt down, on the broad stone step of the house. She was pale under her tan, and there was a curious shadow in her eyes. Juliet had never seen a look so dark and strange as hers.

The taller, fairer girl tried to greet her odd, beautiful little enemy with easy friendliness, but the lightness died beneath a sense of something gloomy and ominous that was floating in the air. It chilled the breeze, and turned the sunshine somber, and, as she looked from the dark face to the other, Juliet felt her heart stir vaguely yet unmistakably with that reiterated warning and foreboding.

"You've come about the signal," said Kitty at once, as she leaned on her gun. "Well, I'm ready to give it."

"What!" cried Juliet, joyfully.

And "What!" exclaimed old Turley, in a big, angry voice.

"Shut up, dad! And you, Miss Nurse, don't be so

everlastingly pleased!" Kitty was ineffably, lazily impudent. She took her time before continuing. "I reckon Nat's dead," she finally remarked.

"He is not at all dead!" said Juliet, laughing. "He is very much alive, and Doctor Clement this very morning pronounced him out of danger."

"I reckon he's dead!" repeated Kitty, indifferently.

"But —" Juliet was beginning impatiently.

"Anyhow," Kitty interrupted tranquilly, "that's the way I understand it." She paused a slow moment, then added: "That's the way I — choose — to understand it. See? I'm going to wear a new shirtwaist to church this morning. It's a right pretty red cashmere —"

Her father's sinister laughter cackled hoarsely out. But Juliet was filled with a high and wrathful scorn.

"So you are really childish enough to keep to that silly threat of yours!" she said disdainfully. "Of course I might have known you would! Good morning, Mr. Turley. I'm sorry I came all the way up here."

But Kitty did not move out of her way.

"Where are you going?" she asked. And, possibly by accident, she shifted the rifle so that the muzzle pointed into the room.

"Why, since you ask me," said Juliet, rather impatiently. "I'm going to give that signal myself."

"Opéra bouffe!" was what she was saying to herself, in exasperation. It was idiotic, impossible that adult persons should be engaged in such a foolish,

theatrical dialogue. The full gravity and consequent drama of the situation she was as yet loath to acknowledge even to herself. She stood there, a white-robed and shining woman, vivid in the dusky half light of the room. Rather beautiful, Kitty admitted grudgingly to herself, and her cruel little soul detested her the more for the fact.

"Yes. You-all do look all fixed up for that signal, sure enough," the girl drawled provokingly. "Such a nice white dress — it would be a pity to waste it! Only —"

"Only — you-all ain't a-goin' to give it nohow," chuckled the old man, with a spiteful satisfaction easy to perceive.

Juliet Gray stared at him, and then at Kitty. The slender, dark girl stood there, imperturbable and oddly menacing, in the sunshine by the door.

"You don't mean," said Juliet, blankly, "that you'll keep me here?"

"Sure!" said Kitty Turley. And for the first time that day she smiled.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE CABIN

"I have a faint cold fear within my veins,
That almost freezes up the breath of life." . . .

SHAKESPEARE.

JULIET could hardly believe her ears at first.

When she realized finally that the thing was true, that these two extraordinary, mediæval persons actually proposed to keep her a prisoner until the time appointed for the signal should be passed, she laughed aloud. But even as she laughed, her whole body shook with anger, and her brain told her besides that the situation was not without its conceivable perils.

Kitty's face darkened when she heard her laugh.

"Funny the way folks are like animals," she remarked. "Seems like a creature's never so lively as just before it's killed!"

Her father cackled again. She paid no attention to him, but went on casually: —

"These bunnies I got to-day now. They were jumping about like so many crickets, and now —" She flipped one soft, limp body with a careless hand.

Juliet, used by now to the girl's malicious irrelevance, said with promptitude: —

"Am I to be killed like the rabbits, because I was too cheerful and laughed?"

"They weren't killed because they were too cheerful," corrected Kitty gently, gazing at her, "but because it was — necessary."

"And you were the inexorable hand of fate — I see!" Juliet laughed again, with deliberate amusement. But scorn flicked its way like a whip through her words. "Will you move that thing of yours, please?"

She glanced at the rifle — a lightly humorous glance that was a delicate insult.

"No," said Kitty, calmly; "I will not."

Old Turley gave a queer sound that was neither growl nor chuckle, but partook oddly of the nature of both. It was a ghoulish sound, and not agreeable to hear.

Juliet's head was buzzing in a remarkable fashion. Still, she did not feel cognizantly frightened, and still she did know herself to be ragingly angry. Resentment and excitement thrilled her with long, electric-like tremors, and she felt extremely cold, but neither of the Turleys could descry the slightest nervousness in her bearing. Her voice, too, was entirely steady, as she said levelly: "I suppose you know that you are behaving foolishly — crazily!"

"Oh, sure!" said old Dan, grinning.

"It's our long suit — craziness," said Kitty.

Juliet was, seemingly, quite unimpressed.

"I have had a good deal of experience with crazy

people," she said pleasantly. "We learn how to handle them pretty well in the hospitals."

Kitty merely said: "That's lucky for you," and a tense silence fell on the group.

It was, however, only a moment before Juliet spoke.

"What are you gaining by this?" she asked quietly. "If he gets no signal at all —"

"He will go away," said Kitty, succinctly.

Juliet breathed hard and quick. "And that's what you want! But he won't go away. He will come and find out about it."

"About what?" Kitty was laconic.

"Everything. This, for instance." Juliet's glance swept the two Turleys, and included the room and all outside and herself in one comprehensive look. She did not mean her words to be a warning pure and simple, but she knew that they sounded like it, and gave a daring little laugh at the thought.

Turley struck in in a heavy voice: "If he's any sense, he'll get out, when he don't hear."

Juliet turned on him like a flash.

"He hasn't any of that kind of sense!" she cried. "That's a sense of danger — and he hasn't got that."

"Ah reckon," said Dan, "he'll look out for his skin as quick as another man."

"Whatever he does," cried Juliet, in a sort of flame, "he'll do it quicker than another man."

Kitty moved suddenly, and began to pant. She was oddly like a wild animal, pressed hard for breath.

"Are you talking this way on purpose?" she burst out.

"What way?" But she knew — Juliet knew just what Kitty meant, for she was absolutely glowing with delight and pride in the man of whom she was speaking, and how could Kitty of all people have failed to feel the fact?

"Do you want," panted the Turley girl, "to drive me into a rage? It would be very foolish of you."

"You are in a rage now," said Juliet, rather contemptuously. "But I don't want to drive you into anything — except your white dress."

"You'll not drive me into that," said Kitty, with simple finality.

"Then," said Juliet, equally simple and equally final, "I mean to wear it for you."

She made a quick and marvelously lithe movement, considering her size and general effect of dignity. But Kitty was too quick for her.

"No, you don't! Take care, or you'll get hurt!"

"Oh, no!" But Juliet herself was panting a little now. "You won't dare to hurt me. Mr. Turley can't afford to let me get hurt."

"Me?" Turley was grinning in a doubtful manner. "Ah don' reckon Ah care much, one way or another." He looked uncomfortable.

"Oh, yes, you care," said Juliet. "You care a lot about having the Under Trail put under police supervision from now on."

"You she devil!" roared Turley. "Would you —"

"I always said she was a peacher at heart," said Kitty.

"Peacher! What a baby you are!" Juliet's voice was hard and clear. Why did she feel her case to be so increasingly, imminently urgent? "Look here! I should not be betraying any confidence of yours if I told the sheriff about the Under Trail. You never said a word about it to me; I found out about it quite accidentally. And I've a perfect right to talk about it to any one I choose — just as much to the sheriff as to you!"

"You pretended to work with us," said Kitty, sullenly.

Turley was irrepressibly malign.

"Quite a matter of pals it were — eh, missy?"

He leered at her crookedly.

Juliet laughed outright. "Pals! You two are *treating* me as a pal, aren't you? Turn and turn about, Miss Kitty! You let me go away from here, and stop trying to interfere with me, and I'll let your precious Trail rest — for the present, anyway!"

"I didn't think," said Kitty, softly, "that you'd be undignified enough to use threats!"

"You see," said Juliet, with entire amiability, "I'm not in a very dignified position!"

After a very brief pause, the old man's anxious voice made itself heard tentatively. "If I was you, Kitty —"

"Shut up, dad," said Kitty. "I want to think."

A greenish light flashed into her mysterious dark

eyes. Such a look of wicked glee radiated her face as startled Juliet. It seemed as though nothing less than the immediate rapture of vengeance could have lit such an unholy and ecstatic flame. Clearly she had thought of something which exactly suited her mood. It almost seemed for a moment that, in her eagerness, she was going to voice the new and ravishing notion in spite of herself — but immediately the cat nature reasserted itself. Like a curtain, something fell over the cruel, vivid little countenance.

With a controlled, inscrutable expression, the girl surveyed her tall prisoner.

"I reckon," she said softly, "I'll go and give that signal — after all!"

Juliet stared at her suspiciously.

"You mean — the red dress?" she demanded.

"No," said Kitty, with a faint, enigmatic smile. "I mean the white dress."

Dan Turley swore violently. The new idea, whatever it was, had not yet been shared by him. He scowled at Kitty without understanding.

But Juliet took a quick step forward.

"You mean it?" she cried. "You really mean that you will wear the white dress, after all, and give — him — the right signal?"

"I'll wear the white dress," said Kitty, looking full at her. That intangible, light smile still touched her lips. Subtly, mysteriously, she exhaled the effluvia of triumph.

Juliet experienced an odd chill. Yet she could not have said why she felt chilled.

"But — but," she exclaimed breathlessly, "it is wonderful of you! What made you change your mind like that?"

"Ah!" said Kitty. "I wonder what it could have been?"

Mockery hissed softly in the sibilant tones. For a second the other girl felt the bewildering sensation of being indulged and baffled, soothed and derided in the same breath. Then she stared harder, and, knitting her brows, was convinced that her impression was one of imagination.

"Of course," she declared more confidently, "I knew you would see it; it just took a little time."

"That's it," agreed Kitty. And this time she really laughed with evident enjoyment of her secret jest. "I see it all now, and it just took me — a little time!"

She walked carelessly and with an undulating step into the room, and handed the rifle to her father.

"I'll go dress," she said briefly, and instantly vanished into the inner room.

"And I think *I'll* go," Juliet said hastily.

She loathed Dan Turley with every nerve and instinct, and felt that the air of this horrible house would choke her if she had to breathe it any longer.

She took a swift step toward the open and now unguarded doorway, but the old man's harsh voice stopped her.

"Ah wouldn' jes' yet!" he advised her, and two heavy steps brought him to her side. She shrank

from him, but there he was, rifle, fierce eyes, and all. "Ah'd wait a bit, an' jes' see what Kitty says."

"Do you let that girl order you about like that?" cried Juliet. She was so irritated that she pushed on past him, and felt a shock of surprise and disgust when his huge, bony hand fell heavily on her arm.

"Ah wouldn'," he insisted. "You jes' wait a while, an' see what she says."

"But what on earth do you both mean by this?" gasped Juliet. "She is going to give the signal — she says so! Why shouldn't I go?"

"Ah don' know jes' what Kitty means," explained the old man, slowly. "An' when Ah don't know, Ah jes' lay low, an' wait to fin' out. That's all. An' you'd better do the same, missy."

"Oh, is that it?" breathed Juliet, furious, but impotent.

Accustomed to economize energy, she sat down, trembling and exasperated, in a chair near the door, and waited, controlling herself rigidly.

Old Dan Turley stood, gaunt and unclean, regarding her; a hideous sentinel, she thought. Oddly enough, she contrived to feel a sense of pity for him mixed with her natural disgust. In all her life, she had never seen any human being so under another's influence as Dan Turley was under that of his daughter. Juliet recalled that she seemed to control Nat Mooney with equal ease.

The influence which Kitty Turley had upon her father and Mooney was indeed remarkable. These

two men, each ignorant and coarse, yet each of a certain rough power in his way, showed toward Kitty's wishes a swift and intuitive comprehension and coöperation which was at times uncanny. Blind obedience it scarcely was, since it often disclosed extraordinary discernment, and an instant grasp of the unspoken, well-nigh the unframed, thought. Since both men demonstrated the same quality, it must be something in Kitty herself which inspired it in them, and also in many others. Juliet marveled over it now and later, but eventually came to the conclusion that this power, sometimes elaborately developed in men and women of the world, the power of impressing others with a point of view without seeming to do so, was preëminently Kitty's.

She was in many ways a surprising little creature. Slow seeming as her movements were, she could yet be incredibly swift when she liked. Although Juliet chafed at every moment's delay, she found herself secretly a little surprised at the short time which elapsed before her remarkable hostess — or was it jailer? — reappeared at the door.

She was as exquisite as a poet's dream, with her dark, curly hair piled high on her little head, a faint wild-rose color blooming in the cream and tan of her face, her eyes as wistful and brooding as deep waters in a wood, and her slender, curving body clothed in a gown of ivory-white flannel.

Not a touch of color was about her dress; even the hat which hung on her arm was white felt with a

snowy quill. Juliet felt that her own crisp frock was stiff and ungraceful before those clinging, yielding folds of creamy woolen. What use in being a goddess when one must compete with a dryad?

Kitty Turley had never looked lovelier, nor more innocently appealing. And when she caught sight of her, Juliet, passionate worshiper of beauty that she was, forgot her chagrin and righteous resentment, and cried: "Oh, how pretty you are!"

"Dressed for the sacrifice!" said Kitty, with that hard flippancy which one never expected from her soft and sorrowful red lips.

Juliet went to her impulsively, and took both her hands in her warm and womanly fingers, as strong as they were gentle.

"Oh, if it is a sacrifice," she cried, with an eager tenderness that came haltingly, she was so shy and so proud, "it is a sacrifice of all that is worst in you!"

"Ah, yes!" said Kitty, with a burlesque sentiment and angry eyes. "I am bringing him tidings of life — life and love! Isn't that the proper phrase?" She shook off Juliet's touch.

The tall, fair girl drew back, wounded — hurt not only in her friendly impulse, but in her unwonted expression of feeling. She felt that she had been silly and melodramatic, and her sensitive face flushed.

"I have been telling your father," she said somewhat stiffly, "that I should like to go now."

"I reckon you would," said Kitty, thoughtfully. "But all the same, I reckon you'd better stop here."

"That's what I say," interposed Turley.

"Stop here!" exclaimed Juliet, in absolute amazement. "For how long?"

"Oh, just a while. Till I get back."

"But my patient —"

"You said he was out of danger. Now just you sit down, and have a nice, quiet morning with dad."

"But what is your object?" protested Juliet. "What harm could it do you?"

"Dad wants company; we'll let it go at that. And we Turleys always take what we want — always, sooner or later." Kitty's eyes glittered — but the glitter was warily subdued. "He's right entertaining, dad is, when you get him talking. I don't reckon you'll be bored. Good-by!"

She nodded indifferently, and departed with that strolling step that covered the ground so speedily, into the blaze of the bright-hued September day.

And then suddenly, for the first time, Juliet felt frightened.

Kitty Turley could hardly be regarded in the light of a protector, nor could either her judgment or her magnanimity be greatly trusted, yet, as the slim, white figure went from view, and Juliet glanced about her, at the grim, gray walls, and at the grim, gray mountaineer, who guarded her, she felt that some menace was approaching her. She could not say as yet if it were near or far.

CHAPTER XIV

A NURSE'S WEAPON

> ". . . Learn
> What first must be encountered, and o'ercome
> Right in the threshold . . . Hate,
> And gliding Murder with his lighted face,
> And Madness howling, — Fear" . . .
>
> STEPHEN PHILLIPS.

DAN TURLEY, with a brown crockery jug on the table before him, was getting slowly, profoundly, murderously drunk.

Kitty had been gone about an hour and a half, and the old man, bored by his enforced sentinel duty, had barred the great door, pulled the heavy table in front of it, cutting off the only means of escape, leaned his rifle against the lintel, and settled himself to drink.

Juliet sat on the other side of the table, watching him closely. She had never seen a man respond to liquor so slowly. It puzzled her at first, and then her professional instinct made a deduction which would be rather startling if it should happen to be correct. He had hardly spoken a word to her, but suddenly he began to talk.

"You-all want a drink?"

"No, thanks."

"You-all make a great mistake. Great mistake,

missy. Ah ain't got no use fo' you-all teetotalers an' re-formers, Ah ain't. Exhil'ration, now! What's wrong with exhil'ration, missy? Nothin'. Not, leastways when it's good luck, or nice weather, or love-makin'. Only when it's drink! Ain't that foolish?"

Juliet cut into this philosophical trend by asking abruptly: —

"When do you expect your daughter back, Mr. Turley?"

"Ah don't expect her," returned the old man, pouring another jorum of the liquid he loved. "She'll come when she gets ready. That's all right."

"You're very fond of her, aren't you?" said Juliet, to draw him out.

Turley said nothing to this, but a sort of light glowed in his bleared eyes.

"Is she — is she at all like — her mother?" Juliet purposely sought for a softening element, yet felt vaguely ashamed of her deliberateness in doing so.

To her surprise, the effect of her words was the opposite of melting. Old Dan straightened up galvanically in his chair.

"Her mother?" he shouted thickly. "Her mother was a chicken-hearted shrimp, as pale as a wild carrot, as couldn't stand stickin' a pig. She'd cry a quart over — over —" His voice sank a little, and the sly look came back to the old eyes. "She'd cry a quart," he repeated, with an evident change of intention.

"And Kitty — your daughter," persisted Juliet, albeit diffidently, "she is different?"

"Kitty?" His tone altered again. "Why, Kitty's a little devil, one of mah own blood! One of mah own kind! She kin shoot as well as me, an' she never gives up a pi'nt, ner fergits a grudge." He spoke with fierce pride. "An' she's schooled. Yes, Kitty's had some plumb fine schoolin'. Sometimes Ah was 'feared Ah'd schooled her too much, got her finickylike. Ah've heard of men as've done that with their gyurls — turned 'em into high an' mighty ladies, as cyan' stomach anythin' anyways rough. But Kitty — Kitty's cert'nly a little devil."

"She has a great deal of attention, hasn't she?" said Juliet.

"'Tention?" The word clearly puzzled him.

"Attention from men; fellows in love with her. Beaux." She did not know what the vernacular might be, but this time Turley understood her, and laughed raucously.

"Yas'm! Kitty's right pop'lar with the male critters. Ah reckon it's 'cause to git on with her a man has to be mighty — mighty —"

"Mighty good?" hazarded Juliet, doubtfully.

"No, missy." He grinned. "Mighty extra bad. Ah reckon Kitty's got plumb little likin' for saints. That's why she took up with Nat Mooney an' Derry Blake."

Juliet's pulse leaped a little at the name.

"Is *he* so — so wicked?" she said hesitatingly.

Dan had an ugly look as he answered: "Ah don' know nothin' 'bout him. Ah reckon he's the only bad lot Ah couldn' never take kindly to."

"You think he is a bad lot?"

"He's cert'nly plumb handy in a fight," said Dan Turley, slowly, as though taking a reluctant inventory of Derry's good points. "An' he's plumb thick with some shady characters; an' he's right much mixed up with women folks, an' he drinks as much as any man I ever saw."

To this Juliet might have added: "And he's been a pal of yours and your daughter's." But she merely said: "Yet you can't take kindly to him, in spite of all that? I should have said he was just your kind!"

"No, Ah don't. 'Cause Kitty says — she says as he's gone back on her."

"When did she say that?"

"T'other night. She says she plumb hates him now, an' is a-goin' to get even with him yet."

"Mr. Turley, do you really believe she hates him?"

"Ah don' know," the old man said doggedly. "She says so, an' Ah reckon that's enough fo' me, any day."

He drank again.

The professional instinct in Juliet began to clamor more loudly now. In her nursing experience, she had met two persons who could drink an almost unlimited quantity of alcohol without becoming in the least affected by it. One was a paranoiac woman, who had since died in a State hospital; one was a young

man who enjoyed the reputation of being eccentric, but who eventually showed himself the victim of recurring homicidal insanity.

"I've heard," she remarked casually, "that men are very proud of their ability to drink a great deal without showing it. I think you are wonderful, Mr. Turley! How much stuff is there in that demijohn?"

"A quart, Ah reckon."

"You must be awfully well and strong to stand so much so splendidly!"

"Ah'm all right. Except when Ah have — queer times." He spoke almost to himself, and she realized with a little thrill that he was in the curious, responsive state that nurses learn to wait for in mental cases — the state in which a fugitive confidence may be obtained by care and stratagem — the state which urges the most crafty patient sooner or later into a betrayal of his weakness.

"Queer?" She leaned a trifle closer to him, and let her voice come to him gently, like a creeping wave.

"We-all have allus been — queer," said Dan, staring straight in front of him. "We've had fits of — oh —"

"Fits of —"

He retreated timidly from the subject. "Ah don' know. Jes' spells like. Nothin' much."

"You mean attacks?"

"Sort of."

"Attacks of — excitement?"

He did not speak, but reached for the cup and drank

again. His hand was shaking very much. The nurse rested her arms on the table, and, looking at him earnestly, began to speak confidentially: —

"There are times, aren't there, when you feel excited, and — violent? You see, I know all about it. Times when you have to drink a great deal, but never feel it at all, and when — when —" Her voice dropped still another note; she had forgotten her own peril; she was deeply interested in getting the confidence of a new patient, and gave herself up to the experiment, without thought of results. "Times," she went on, "when you feel that you must hurt something — must crush something — must even ——" She checked herself as she was going to say the word "kill."

Dan was looking at her with a strange, swift glitter in his eyes. His mouth opened slowly in a frightful grin. He did not say a word, but Juliet knew that with every fiber of his crazy organization he was affirming her diagnosis.

That was it; it was incipient insanity — intermittent, homicidal mania. No wonder he had a criminal record too ugly even for his mates to stomach! No wonder there sprang in his daughter such odd and terrible whimsicalities of temperament!

Kitty, Juliet now perceived, was the perfect type of the criminal defective's offspring. In the girl, outwardly refined by education and the heritage of her more delicately bred mother, were the same warped and inflamed mental traits, only somewhat differently

developed. Already Juliet had seen in her inherent cruelty, violent passion, and an utter lack of moral balance, all set together in a personality of the wildest erraticism.

Shocking as the secret derangement of old Turley was, Juliet found herself less surprised than she would have expected to be. She even wondered that she had not consciously expected something of the sort.

And now she understood for the first time that mysterious warning instinct which had been telegraphing "danger" so persistently to her brain. She faced the situation, analyzing it clearly, and estimating possibilities with the knowledge born of excellent training and much practical and executive experience.

Even as she did so, Turley drank again, and this time could not hold the cup between his quivering fingers. It fell to the floor with a loud clash. The noise affected his sick nerves remarkably. He leaped to his feet, with a frantic look on his face, his lips snarling back from his broken yellow teeth, his hands opening and closing convulsively. Juliet rose quietly, took a single step back of her chair, and stood there, cool and ready. For she saw that something inside that disordered brain had mysteriously snapped. For the time being, Dan Turley was mad.

"Oh, Gawd!" gasped the old man, beating the air. "Somethin's happened in mah haid! Somethin' awful's happened in mah haid!"

"Will you let me help you?" Juliet slipped her hand

into the front of her dress, where she now always carried her hypodermic case.

"Help me? Help me? No one — not Gawd almighty nor the devil himself kin help me!"

"I can, if you'll let me." She wondered swiftly whether she had any apomorphine with her. "I can give you something." She spoke quietly, soothingly, but eagerness made her voice tremble just a bit, and the over acute sense of the maniac detected it. He backed away from her with furious cunning.

"Yo' ain't gwine to give me nothin', missy!" he growled, grinning crookedly at her. "Ah kin take mah own medicine."

He snatched up the empty jug, shook it, eyed it, and then, scowling heavily, he rose, and crossed the room to a cupboard built high in the wall. Juliet's hand flashed up — and then down — beneath the edge of the big table.

"What are you looking for?" she asked. But her heart was beating violently. How long would it take him — how long?

"Some of mah own stuff! Some of mah own stuff!" He clawed impatiently at the refractory cupboard door. His muscles were not in control, and his movements were incoördinate; he could not open the thing immediately.

"Stuff you make?" Her voice was entirely steady now.

"Sure!" He smote the cupboard with his clenched fist.

"And sell?" She shifted her position carefully.

"No, ma'am. Ah don't sell this. It's too — good! Ah drink it!"

He chuckled, but immediately began to curse the cupboard, and whoever had locked it.

Juliet's back was turned to him; she was working quickly, cautiously, with her tiny syringe, and a few drops of liquid from the pitcher of water which stood on the table beside the empty demijohn. Could she possibly do it? Accustomed as she was to emergencies, she yet found her fingers not absolutely steady. The phial of wee tablets slipped to the floor, and broke. She stooped breathlessly, and succeeded in clutching two or three of the little white disks.

Old Dan had been insanely tearing at the closed doors of the cupboard, and now with a yell of triumph he wrenched it open.

"Ah've got it!" he shouted, staggering where he stood, as he ransacked the shelves. Half of the bottles and demijohns within were empty or uncorked, and he cursed them all, one after the other. But in a minute he had found what he was looking for, a big black flask, over which he gloated crazily, as he hugged it to his breast and laughed hoarsely under his breath.

As he lurched back to the table, Juliet pushed the water pitcher back to where it had stood. The prepared hypodermic needle she held behind her in her right hand. But Dan Turley was watchful as only the drunk and the mad can be watchful.

"What were yo'-all a-doin' with that thar pitcher?" he demanded harshly, a red light in his eyes.

"What pitcher?" But she knew, for all her coolness, that the fight was on.

"Curse yo'!" he howled. "Ah saw yo' put it back on the table! Ah saw yo'."

He seized the pitcher, and smelled it suspiciously.

"You see, Mr. Turley," said Juliet, calmly, "there's nothing in it but water."

"But what were yo'-all doin' with it? Ah saw yo'—"

"Why, to tell you the truth," she said, "I wanted a drink myself! You didn't offer me any water, and I was thirsty, and—"

For a second he eyed her doubtfully, then broke out again, the more savagely for the momentary hesitation.

"Yo'-all are lyin'!" he roared. "What were yo'-all doin' with that—"

He stretched out, and caught at her arm, but she jerked herself backward. Her sleeve, which he had grasped, ripped clear from the shoulder and hung in two pieces. As is often the way in such a crisis, the trifling incident only served to infuriate the creature still more.

He lurched upon her, his huge, bare forearm, gaunt and hairy, raised in menace. His hand was not clenched into a fist, but held in a clutching position, with bony fingers crooked into claws. Some vile and cruel bird of prey might have so swooped upon

its victim, hungry for some monstrous rending of tortured flesh. Juliet felt certain that the man wished and meant to tear her in pieces. His was a murder lust of the body, not the brain. It was not a death alone that his madness craved; it was a violent death — running blood, torn tissues, racked bones. He thirsted unhappily and wildly for the sight and sound of suffering, for something abominable and ferocious, which should be the last word in that yearning to kill which the greatest of all realists has described as the "Human Beast."

The frightful face glared before her, like nothing mortal that she had ever seen. Nothing in a psychopathic ward had ever seemed one half so appalling. All the secret, inherent madness of the man, all his brazen and cultivated criminality, seemed focused into one burning, terrific, barbarous moment. Vulturous, infuriate, he leaped at her, and, as the arm fell, she slipped miraculously beneath and past it, letting his own reckless balance pitch him face downward upon the table.

He rolled over, swearing hideously and foaming at the mouth, but already Juliet had flung herself upon him, and the needle was in his arm. With a howl of fury, he fought her off, dragged himself free, lurched upright, and lunged at her once more.

She prayed for the drug to act, but, even as she prayed, she slipped unexpectedly to the left, so that a big chair was between them. As he struck at her across it, she pushed it toward him with all her

Already Juliet had flung herself upon him — *Page* 168.

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strength. It stuck against his knees, and almost tripped him up again, but he recovered himself, and with a frantic gesture he caught up the empty brown jug, to hurl it at her.

"Now!" she prayed, for she was at her wits' ends. "Oh, God, please let it be now!"

She bent down quickly, springing aside, but the heavy thing glanced against her shoulder, making her stagger.

"Try to get away, yo' she devil!" shrieked the madman. "Ah'm goin' to send yo'-all back home. Ah'm gwine to send yo'-all back home to hell."

Dizzy now from the pain in her shoulder, and panting from her exertions, Juliet steadied herself by the edge of the table, and let herself drop almost to a crouching position on the floor.

"Please, God," she went on praying — and she found that she was saying the words aloud, "let it be now — now — now!"

All at once the big table to which she was clinging trembled and swayed as though moved by a sudden heavy weight. With a pounding heart, she pulled herself upright, and looked.

Dan Turley was leaning on his two hands, his face gray-green, a curious film gathering across his eyes. There was a look of terror on the leaden countenance, terror and bewilderment. The next moment he had fallen slowly, ponderously, to the floor. The drug had worked in time.

The girl leaned against the barred door, and shut her eyes for a minute. She felt very sick.

Five minutes later, Juliet, flying as though pursued by demons, met Kitty Turley on the trail.

Breathing quickly, the two girls faced each other. Kitty was flushed like a dark rose, and looked radiantly beautiful, in spite of the obvious rage and amazement which flamed in her face at sight of her erstwhile captive. Juliet was white to the lips, and they were set in a stern line. Her linen sleeve hung in tatters about her bare arm, and Kitty noted, crisping with jealousy, that, while less fragile, the arm was as well shaped as her own, and far whiter.

"How did you get out?" demanded the mountain girl, briefly. "Did dad get drunk?"

"Yes," remarked Juliet, dryly. "He did!"

Kitty's features relaxed in a smile.

"I thought he might," she admitted. "But I reckon he must have been right bad to let you out."

"He was!" said Juliet. "Miss Turley, your father has had a — a — an attack of some kind."

She hesitated. Kitty started, and stared at her.

"A very dangerous kind of attack," Juliet added with some emphasis.

The other paled slightly. It had been a very, very long time since her father had had one of his "queer spells." Could it be that which this woman meant?

"I don't reckon I understand," she said, shifting her brilliant dark gaze.

"Oh, I think you do!" said Juliet, contemptuous of the subterfuge. "Probably you meant him to

kill me in one of those fits of his. Well, he didn't. Now I'm going home. And, Miss Turley" — she spoke quite indifferently — "you'd better not try to arouse him for a bit after this. He'll probably sleep for some time, and wake up entirely quiet."

She turned down the trail, but Kitty's voice, rather shrill now, arrested her: —

"Have you hurt dad?"

"No," said Juliet. "Strange as it may seem according to your peculiar ideas, I have not had the slightest wish to hurt him. I have, on the contrary, kept him from hurting himself or any one else for the present. But I warn you that this — attack — was an exceedingly dangerous one; dangerous *in several ways*."

There was no mistaking the cold significance of the tone in which she said the last words.

This time Kitty made no attempt to stop her, but, after she had gone ten steps, Juliet turned of her own accord, and said quietly: "Did you give the signal?"

"Yes!" returned Kitty Turley, and her little white teeth snapped viciously together. Her eyes blazed in the lovely little face that had grown paler now. "I gave the signal!"

She went on up the trail.

CHAPTER XV

WAITING

"There is a shadow on the plain
Of Winter as he comes again, —
There is in woods a solemn sound
Of hollow warnings whispered round,
As Echo in her deep recess
For once had turned a prophetess. . . ."

THOMAS HOOD.

NAT MOONEY was soon nearly well, and Juliet went back to Evartson and Miss Alicia.

The eccentric old lady was delighted to see her, for she was truly attached to her pretty and sensible nurse, and had missed her greatly. Even Louise was amiable, and made her welcome after her own slightly ungracious fashion. Every one was immensely interested in her sojourn on Liberty Ridge, and plied her with questions almost as assiduously as they plied her with food. They seemed convinced that she must be as starved as a newly rescued shipwreck victim.

"On the contrary," Miss Gray assured them merrily. "Pork and beans and soda bread are excessively filling, you may take my word for it."

"Pork and beans!" ejaculated Miss Alicia, appalled. "Soda bread! Now who, in this world, ever heard of

soda bread? And how, my dear, did you ever come to eat such terrible things?"

"Mr. Mackanerny used to bring them from the men's meals."

"Soda bread!" repeated the lady, with a sigh of helpless disgust. "I wonder what in the world — My dear, I am surprised that you have any digestion left!"

"I didn't mind it a bit." Juliet laughed, and lips and cheeks were rosy. Louise regarded the unclouded blue of the nurse's eyes with envy.

"No wonder Craig raves about her looks!" she thought. Aloud, she said with curiosity, "Weren't you frightfully uncomfortable?"

"I've been in better — and worse — quarters." Juliet laughed again.

"Such an adventure!" sighed Miss Alicia, who hid a romantic soul under her somewhat dry exterior.

"Did any of those queer mountain creatures fall in love with you?" asked Louise. It was quite an idle shot, but Juliet turned away to hide her swiftly deepening color, and began to prepare beef extract for her patient.

"What was it like?" went on Louise. "Awfully rough?"

Juliet glanced about the dainty place, all gray and rose, which Miss Alicia Evarts called her "morning room," but in which, as a matter of fact, she spent most of her days.

"Well," she confessed, as she salted the smoking

bouillon, "it was rather rough compared to this. But it wasn't so bad at that."

"I believe," Louise Evarts declared, staring at the light in her face — "I believe you almost liked it!"

Juliet's color flamed brighter than ever, and she caught her breath; her eyes were like blue stars.

"I believe," she said — "I believe — I almost — did!"

The Evarts family would gladly have had her waive her duties for a day or two, rest, and submit to being treated as an honored guest instead of a paid nurse. But Miss Gray had insisted on taking up the care of Miss Evarts, just as before. Indeed she felt the better for the continued occupation. Tired as she was from her experiences on the Ridge, the present suspense and ceaseless tension of her nerves was far harder to bear.

For she was waiting — waiting to hear from Derry Blake.

He had received the signal; he must have seen Kitty in her white dress that Sunday morning. And he had promised that he would come. How long would it be? How long would he wait? In her heart, with feminine impatience and lack of logic, she had expected him to appear instantly on receipt of the tidings of Nat's recovery. On the wings of the wind, he should somehow have flown to her! Yet three — seven — ten — fifteen days had passed, and there had come no word from him. Had he forgotten? Or — was Kitty right? Was he, after all,

the sort of man who could love, and forget, many women? She knew that she had been far from the first in his heart; was it not at least conceivable that she and those strange, wild meetings on Liberty Ridge had been but a chapter in his man's life?

Her being ached with the thought. But as these and other days passed, and still he did not come, the character of the ache changed subtly and oddly, passing from haunting dread to indignation and outraged pride, and finally to a blank, painful loneliness, which settled down like clinging sea fog upon the hope and ardor of her awakened heart.

It did not come at once, this relinquishing of expectation. There were long, feverish days first, during which she struggled against apprehension, discharged her daily duties, parried the curiosity of Miss Evarts and Louise, and evaded Craig's increasingly persistent attentions. She was proud of her own good front, at this time, believing that she had hidden her spiritual and emotional battles far from the possibility of discovery or espionage.

But her friends found her altered. Among themselves they agreed that she was in some way different; they admitted that they could not say just how.

"Older looking," Miss Alicia thought.

"A little tired, probably," said Louise.

"Perhaps she's bothered about something," was Craig Evarts' own suggestion. In his soul he hoped with male egotism that she might subconsciously and involuntarily be falling in love with him!

His Aunt Alicia suspected him of this fatuity, and sniffed. To her mind, the thing was most unlikely. Miss Gray, while in young Evarts' society, evinced no symptoms in any way encouraging. Louise, however, was rather afraid that it might be so. For reasons of her own she greatly hoped that it was impossible, but still — Craig was infatuated, and how, as she reminded her aunt anxiously, could Miss Gray fail to gratefully accept a young man like Craig? "Only fancy — a nurse!"

"Stuff!" said Miss Evarts. "She's better born than we are."

Juliet could not help feeling that Miss Alicia did not need her much longer, but she dreaded going away from the neighborhood, and losing the possibility of hearing from Derry Blake.

One night, when she brought her patient her hot cocoa in bed, she ventured to broach the subject, with some hesitation.

"Will — do you think you will want me much longer now, Miss Evarts?" she asked shyly.

Miss Alicia stared up at her from the depths of a lace nightcap which she affected.

"Want you?" she repeated, astonished. "Why, child — do you want to go home so much?"

"No, no!" Juliet hastened to answer her, with almost painful eagerness. "Of course I don't. But you are so much better, and —"

"Conscience, eh? You see," said Miss Alicia, brusquely, "I like you. And I like having you around.

And I can pay for what I particularly like, thank God! Never had any patience with people who run down the blessings of money, and this is a case in point. My dear, I can afford you, and I want you, if you will stay. I hope," added the old woman, a little wistfully, "that you won't misunderstand me. I talk rather oddly sometimes. Rude. Hard. But — I should like you with me."

Juliet smiled gently at her, and nodded without speaking.

"You aren't too tired?" pursued Miss Alicia, sharp again.

"Why, of course not! I'm only too happy to stay."

"Anything at home worrying you?"

"No. I haven't any home now."

"Your people?"

"I haven't any people, either."

"That nephew of mine doesn't pester you, does he?" the old lady said bluntly.

Juliet flushed, but shook her head. "Not a bit!" she replied with a frank smile.

"H'm! Do you want to marry him, by any chance?"

"No, Miss Evarts, I don't."

"Of course, you *ought* to want to."

"I like him very much, but —"

"But you don't love him?"

"Oh, no!" Juliet shook her head vehemently.

Miss Alicia regarded her.

"H'm! You're very certain of it," she declared.

"In my experience, when a young woman is so desperately sure she doesn't love one man, it usually means that she —"

But Miss Gray had fled with the empty cup.

"She's in love!" said Miss Evarts, settling her nightcap and herself for repose. "Nice girl. Pretty. Clean. Worth six of Louise. I'd like her for a niece. But Craig hasn't a chance. She's in love!"

And she slept.

Many things Juliet had gained and learned from Liberty Ridge, but she had paid many penalties, too. One of these was a sense of suffocation which she now felt often in civilized life and a civilized environment. In the Evartston library, too heavily and handsomely furnished, too lavishly and indiscriminately stocked with books, and too enervating with its wood-fire warmth, she felt a violent recurring thirst for the wild, cold air of the Ridge. She longed for the swooping, great winds, fragrant with fir, and acrid now and again with burning brush, spicy, rich, life-giving, redolent of earth and the wholesome things that grow therein. Her eyes ached for big spaces, for open sky, and pure, blinding light. Yet sometimes when the electric globe flared garishly in the evenings, she shrank from the hard, white glare, and yearned as restlessly for the wide, dark, quiet heavens that stretched above the Ridge at night.

Most bitterly of all, her spirit chafed at the littleness of everyday existence. Living, as these people

and their kind understood it, seemed such a tame, colorless, limited business. Such silly matters appeared to them worthy of attention. Such odd precautions struck them as necessary — precautions against rain, and drafts, and sun, and violent emotions, and rough living, and unconventionality — and so many, many other vital and important and valuable things! In the revulsion of her soul, Juliet often would have liked to go out of doors and sit in the dew till she was drenched, to bake herself in the burning sun, to walk barefoot till her soles were cut, to dispense with heavy clothes and eat with her fingers — to do anything and everything that was elemental and free and healthy and rebelliously different from the things that correct persons did!

Craig Evarts got her to go riding with him nearly every day, and her happiest times were when she cantered through the wild gorges, or followed the bridle paths that threaded the mountains up and down. She was immeasurably restless.

And still there was no message from Derry Blake.

One October afternoon, Evarts took her with him on horseback to see the completed road on Liberty Ridge. The day was softly overcast, and a winter chill was in the wind. The first splendor of the fall colors had passed and faded; now, under the gray light, the red-browns, the russets, and the cold, far tones of silver were all gently merged in a bluish tone inexpressibly dim and sad. Some great hand had been laid on the brightness of a few weeks ago, and

had wiped away the glory. Under the horses' feet a faint crackle sounded now and then of lightly frozen mud; the frost was early, and alternated with days of stormy rain.

Juliet had dreaded going back to Liberty Ridge, but to her surprise, the sight of the familiar trail, the queer, rude, little cottage where Mackanerny smiled and waved from the doorway, the voices of the workmen, the distant glimpse of the bunk houses, seen the more easily for the falling leaves, — all these simple things touched her like the sight of an old friend. She could not understand why she should feel so, but it seemed to her that this was the scene of some short, vivid, vital part of her life, and that she had been away from it for years and years.

She found her eyes full of tears. And seeing that sudden softness in her face, that girlish glow and sweetness, and the wistful look about her mouth, Craig Evarts lost his head entirely, and, leaning over from his horse, laid his hand on hers.

"Will you marry me?" he blurted, lamely enough, but with his heart in his honest eyes. He had not meant to speak so soon, but she seemed suddenly too dear and desirable for his strength of resistance. As she did not answer, he tightened his clasp on her gloved hand. "Will you marry me?" he repeated yearningly.

Juliet shrank, and the tears dried in her eyes.

"Oh, no — no!" she faltered. "Oh, I wish — I wish — that you hadn't asked me!"

"It's no matter," said Craig Evarts, hastily, in the generous formula that came easily to his lips. He tried to smile as he quickly withdrew his hand, lest he hurt or offend her. "It's no matter!" he repeated stoutly. "But — but I'll ask you again, you know."

CHAPTER XVI

"YOU MIGHT AS WELL TAKE HIM"

'Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height:
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang)
In height and cold, the splendour of the hills?

* * * * * * * * *

For Love is of the valley, come thou down
And find him; by the happy threshold he
Or hand in hand with Plenty. . . ."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

WHEN they had reached the bunk house, Juliet found that her old patient was up and about again, paler and pastier than ever. He was servile to Evarts, and scowled ungratefully at his late nurse. Juliet was sure that whenever he looked at her, he recalled Kitty's hatred of her and shared it.

He complained whiningly of "being in wrong with the boys," since his row with Blake. Clearly they had boycotted him among themselves, and Juliet was glad of it. Nat Mooney was a poisonous creature, and the general dislike of him argued well for the wholesomeness of human nature.

Even the foreman observed dryly that "there was a deal of difference between rascals, and of many breeds Mooney's was the worst."

"Does he do his work well?" asked Evarts, tersely, when the man in question was out of hearing.

"Not any too well, sir!" Mack declared. "He's drunk or sulky or runnin' off with the Turley lass two thirds of the time."

"Fire him!" said Evarts.

"I will that!" said the Scotchman, with a sort of grim heartiness.

"Poor thing!" said Juliet, suddenly sorry for him.

"Ye've a tender heart, mem, I'm thinkin'!" said Mackanerny, dryly. "There's few can afford to waste their sympathy on Nat Mooney, and that's the truth."

Mack rode with them from the bunk house that stood highest on the Ridge to his own shack. As they rode, he told them in his cursory way the varied news of the trail. Dan Turley, Juliet was not surprised to learn, was acting "queer." Kitty, for that matter, looked sick herself. Last, Derry Blake had evidently gotten clean out of the country.

On the way down the mountain, they came upon Kitty Turley, and she stood stock-still, and stared at them.

She was looking very ill. Juliet, who had last beheld her blooming like a wild rose in her white woolen gown, felt a distinct sense of shock when she saw the strange change which had taken place in the girl meanwhile. Even in this scant month that had gone by, she had grown thin. Always slender, she had now a transparent attenuation of line very

startling to look upon. Her soft, warm-hued flesh had taken on a deathlike pallor; the tan upon it deepened, but did not warm the tone of it. That was dusky, olive, with bluish shadows around the lips and beneath the eyes. The mouth itself was pinched and pale, and the eyes — Kitty Turley's eyes had always been large; now they appeared monstrous, disproportionate. They had been always bright; now they glittered, fierce yet cold, with an unnatural brilliance. Kitty looked older, too — worn and shrunken. Her splendid hair was dull and unkempt; she stooped ever so little, and walked with a slightly dragging step.

"Good Lord!" muttered Evarts, staring at her with uncontrollable astonishment. "What's the matter with her?"

"Why — it's Kitty Turley!" exclaimed Juliet, superfluously, but she was nearly incoherent with surprise.

"She used to be a beauty!" said Craig Evarts, also irrelevantly.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Juliet reined up, and called quickly: —

"Miss Turley!"

At the sound of her voice, Kitty shivered, but she did not move.

In a moment, she said tonelessly, "Good morning," and then she slowly turned away those terrible, great eyes of hers.

"I" — Juliet hesitated, then hurriedly went on — "I am afraid that you have been ill!"

Instantly she felt ashamed of the baldness of what she had said. Would Kitty think her impertinent? She had really meant it kindly, had spoken out of an inconsequent surge of pity and generous feeling, but she knew that this queer little enemy that she had made might choose to be unaccountably insulted.

She seemed, however, quite indifferent.

"No," she answered in the same dull tone. Juliet felt a start of compassion as she remembered the rich voice of a few weeks ago. "No; I haven't been ill. Dad has, though." She glanced at Juliet quickly, then her eyes were again averted. The girl who watched her fancied that there were the faintest lines of anxiety about the listless mouth, but she was not sure.

"I am sorry," Juliet said simply.

"Why?" asked Kitty. "Why should you say that you are sorry? You did it."

"I did it? I?" Juliet was frankly nonplused.

"Kitty, you are rude and absurd!" broke in Evarts, angrily. "What on earth could Miss Gray have to do with your father? She —"

"She did something to him up there in the cabin," said Kitty, in the same expressionless manner. "He's been—strange—ever since. The boys can tell you."

"Miss Turley," said Juliet, gently. "When I saw your father, he was on the verge of a serious collapse. I told you that he had had a dangerous attack."

"I suppose he's been drinking himself into fits again!" interposed Evarts, though under his breath.

"That's no lie, sir," growled Mackanerny. "He's as daft as a lizard."

"It all started that day," said Kitty, looking steadily at Juliet.

The latter leaned from her horse, to say earnestly:—

"That day I did nothing except save him from killing me, and probably himself, too. But I was afraid at the time that he was at the breaking point; he is, I should think, most likely to have recurring attacks of violence, increasing until —" She paused.

"Until he goes mad for keeps!" said Mackanerny, somewhat brutally, but he had no love for the Turleys, father or daughter.

"All the same she did it!" said Kitty, impassively obstinate.

"You must be crazy yourself!" exclaimed Evarts, impatiently. He had no idea what episode the two girls were referring to, but he gathered that Juliet had been subjected to some annoyance, perhaps even to some danger, and he greatly resented the fact.

"Yes," said Kitty Turley, "I reckon I am crazy. But if I am, that's all her fault, too. She took *him* away from me."

"I tell you," declared Evarts, angrily, "she never touched your father."

Kitty shook her head, and looked steadily at Juliet.

"I don't mean that — this time," she said.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, what do you mean?"

"She knows."

"Knows what?"

"Ye irritatin' little heathen!" grunted Mack.

"She knows," Kitty said again.

"Oh, don't question her any more!" begged Juliet, to whom the conversation had become neither more nor less than an agony.

And at that Kitty broke into a laugh. It was a remarkably unpleasant laugh, and struck her listeners as quite in keeping with her ghastly appearance.

"No!" she mocked. "Don't question me any more!" Suddenly she glanced from the mounted girl to the mounted man beside her, with an expression almost human enough to be curiosity — almost, but not quite. "Are you two going to be married?"

"Of all the impudent —" Mackanerny, shocked, began to expostulate.

But Juliet, who had grown a little pale, said quickly: "No. You know quite well that we are not."

Evarts was surprised at the earnestness with which she spoke. Earnest in his turn, he said: —

"Not yet, Kitty. I only wish we were!"

Juliet felt sharply annoyed by the publicity of the declaration, but his grave and adoring smile disarmed her in spite of herself.

Kitty looked at her, and laughed again.

"You might just as well take him," she said. "You've lost the other one!"

Then she turned her back on them, and gazed out across the shadowed valley; already the early October dusk was upon them.

"She's out of her mind!" exclaimed Evarts, frown-

ing. "What a preposterous speech! She can't know what she was saying!"

"Hush!" said Juliet, quickly. She was flushing and paling by turns. There was a pathetic little stiffening of her lips before she could speak. "I think myself," she went on, "that she cannot have known what she was saying."

But two things were very clear to her, as they rode on — her subtle reproach had been lost on Kitty, and the singular and merciless little creature had been — right! All through the ride home, in the cold, misty, late afternoon, with the long, low sunset rays, chill, amber and green, slanting into the valley over Liberty Ridge — anon paling and dying as the clouds rolled in again — the words rang ceaselessly, cruelly, in her ears: "You might as well take him; you've lost the other one. You might as well take him; you've lost the other one. You might as well take him —"

"How early it gets dark now!" said Craig Evarts, speaking after a long silence, while they walked their horses on a rough bit of the road.

"Yes, doesn't it?" Juliet forced herself to talk naturally. "And there's quite a chill in the air now."

Her own words sounded like tolling bells in her ears and mingled their dismal harmonies with the echoes of Kitty's taunt: "There's quite a chill in the air now. You might as well take him; you've lost the other one. There's quite a chill in the air now. You've lost —"

"These are nearly the last of the real autumn days;

there's snow coming," went on Evarts, sniffing the air. "Winter will soon be here."

They let the horses out a bit on the wide, hard highway, and the rhythmic hoofs pounded out the same weary iteration: "Winter will soon be here; you've lost the other one."

She was very silent until they rode up to the door of Evartston. It was almost dark by that time, and between the half-drawn curtains of the long library windows opening on to the terrace a ruddy light was flickering. How brightly the firelight showed in the thickening twilight! How rosy it looked — and how comfortable! Inside, Juliet knew that Miss Alicia and Louise were having afternoon tea. As well as though she were already seated there, she could see in her mind's eye the pretty low table, with its silver teaset, dainty cups, and Royal Worcester cracker jar; could see, too, the "curate's delight" loaded with hot, buttered muffins, and little frosted cakes.

There was shelter there, comfort, and — even if a little reluctant— a family welcome awaiting her, which she could soon make warmer. And Derry had not come back. He would never come back, now — never, never come back to her. It was a whole month, a whole month — and now he would not come at all. What was the use? "You've lost the other one; you might as well take him."

Evarts was standing waiting to help her dismount, but she sat still a moment in the saddle, almost mechanically stroking the little mare's dappled neck.

"Just a moment," she said rather breathlessly. "Just a moment."

She felt terribly tired — more weary and listless than ever in her life before. With every fiber of her woman's body, with every pulse of her woman's heart, she wanted, in that moment, to be taken care of. Where was the brave and freedom-loving girl who had met fate undaunted on Liberty Ridge — who, only a week ago, had raged inwardly against the shackles and constraints of civilization? With the passing of Derry out of her life, with the passing of the hope of seeing him again — these strange, wild, joyous qualities had passed, too.

She looked up and away to Liberty Ridge, dark and remote against the last tawny glow of the sunset sky. It was very, very far away, her Ridge, and it looked cold and gloomy.

She leaned from the saddle, and put her hands on Craig's lifted arms.

When she was on the step of the house, she turned and faced him. Even in that dim light he could not help seeing how weary and white she looked.

"Mr. Evarts," she said gently, "a little while ago you asked me to marry you, and I said no."

"Yes!" he replied, breathing quickly. She saw him clench his hands, and check a step toward her.

"You said that you would ask me again."

"Yes."

"Mr. Evarts, you need not do that," she said very simply and quietly. "For I will marry you when you like."

CHAPTER XVII

THANKSGIVING AT EVARTSTON

"Come, thaw the cold, and lay a cheerful pile
Of fuel on the hearth;
Broach the best cask, and make old Winter smile
With seasonable mirth.
This be our part — let Heaven dispose the rest!

* * * * * * * *

E'en let us shift to-morrow as we may. . . ."

WILLIAM COWPER.

IT was a month later.

Evartston was filled with fir boughs from the woods, and hothouse flowers from Richmond, and guests from half a dozen parts of the world. Miss Alicia, in her best laces and grandest air, spent her time trying to prove that the saying "A body cannot be in two places at once" was a fallacy. There was a second motor car in the garage, and the stables were stocked with half a dozen extra saddle horses from the Springs' Livery. The Evartses were giving a house party over Thanksgiving, in honor of Juliet Gray, Craig's fiancée.

Miss Evarts had been exceedingly nice and cordial about the engagement. She was genuinely fond of Juliet, and she was pleased though frankly astonished

by her nephew's successful and rapid wooing. But Craig's sister Louise had been a trifle more difficult.

Louise Evarts was inclined to like the other girl personally, and she was not really bad-hearted herself, but there were several reasons why she could not bring herself to receive a sister-in-law with open arms. The fact was, that Louise had private but speedy views as to matrimony herself. Her chosen lord was impecunious and helpless, and would certainly have to be supported by his bride's connections.

While Craig remained unmarried, or if he married money, the wherewithal for Louise's prospective ménage would be comfortably forthcoming, but, though her brother had a fortune very satisfying for one extravagant young couple, it could not be stretched to a capacity sufficient for the wants of two.

Louise's own money would not come to her until she was thirty, if she happened to marry without her aunt's consent — her eccentric father had fixed that before his death — and she had good reason to know what Aunt Alicia would think of the young man whom she had in mind!

Besides — though this was a less vital point — Juliet was too good-looking to be entirely acceptable as a sister-in-law. It disgruntled Louise to have to play second fiddle to a nurse — and such a horribly grand nurse!

Louise herself was small and plump, not unpleasing, but far from being a beauty. Her eyes were the usual grayish blue; her hair the usual dull brown; her

complexion the usual freckled fair. She had no "air," and could not wear her clothes well. Whereas Juliet had always appeared distinguished, even in her professional white, and, now that she wore frocks like other people, she looked, as Louise grudgingly confessed, "no end stunning."

"It is good blood does it," declared Miss Evarts, nodding sagely. "I have very little of it myself, but I have just enough to recognize it in other persons. She has heart and courage, that girl — a gallant young creature."

"She looks like a great lady," said her niece, discontentedly.

"Or a great woman," said Aunt Alicia. "I believe that they are much the same, if people only knew it."

"Every one admires her a lot," said Louise.

"They'd better!" snorted the eccentric of the family.

"Tommy Norton admires her."

"Oh, Tommy Norton!" And Miss Alicia's tone and expression made further comment unnecessary.

Tommy Norton, Louise's choice, was a youth of anæmic look and racing proclivities. He was not a good gambler, for his luck was non-existent, and he was a shocking bad loser. Repeated failures and his consequent depression had blighted his life. He was not capable of caring for any one very much, but he liked persons who petted him and sympathized with him and provided for him, and Louise Evarts was prepared to do all three if she got the chance.

She was, indeed, devoted to him — just why, her family and friends often were prone to wonder. Probably the true reason was that he was the sole person to whom she had ever believed herself necessary. She had the deep-seated feminine longing to be needed in the life of some man, and really thought that, on the whole, she would be a very good thing for Tommy. And Tommy thought so himself.

If only she could support dear Tommy for the rest of his natural existence, and buy him the kinds of cigarettes and Scotch he liked, and give him all the money he wanted to lose on luckless horses! But it would take quite a bit, all told, for dear Tommy had his clubs, and Louise herself, while far from the millionaire class, was accustomed to spending about fifteen thousand a year on her personal fripperies!

She gave a deep, impatient sigh whenever she thought of this big blond girl so soon to enter the family, so soon to take over the right to Callot negligees and Charvet blouses. That she herself could still enjoy these luxuries, so long as she did not marry Tommy, did not reconcile her to the situation. She wanted money — and Tommy; nice clothes — and Tommy; New York winters, Aiken springs, Newport summers, and Virginia autumns — *and Tommy!*

It was Thanksgiving evening, and dinner would be announced in ten minutes.

Louise, rather flushed and frumpy, in a rose-hued dinner dress too pink for her high color, was sulking in the library.

"Put a little more powder on your nose and on your left cheek," her aunt advised her calmly.

Miss Alicia herself was looking very smart in plum color and old-fashioned amethysts. She was a handsome old woman, with a bright, temperish eye, and a delightful smile. Her hair was gray, and her nose hooked, points which were very comforting to her, giving as they did an illusion of the aristocratic breeding which she so greatly respected.

"What a pity it is," she added meditatively, as Louise took out a gold vanity case and viciously dabbed at her shiny little nose — "*what* a pity it is that the good old days of delicate and becoming make-up are gone! In the eighteenth century, ladies knew how to wear paint and powder and patches daintily and smartly, and there were no vulgar nor dowdy women in society. There, there, my dear! You needn't make yourself look like a Pieriette. I said a *little* powder!"

"You aren't always nagging Juliet about powdering her nose!" cried Louise, with a slightly hysterical snort.

"Juliet's skin, my love, is white enough without powder," said Miss Evarts, with entire good humor.

And just then Juliet herself came into the room, with her slow, graceful step and gracious bearing. Miss Alicia smiled at her affectionately, but Louise felt a sharp twinge of irritation at sight of the tall and lovely figure in the plain black evening gown. Juliet was pale, but her blue eyes, and golden hair simply

dressed, made her as effective as a Northern princess in a fairy tale.

"Bless me, how handsome you are!" remarked Miss Evarts, and patted her arm as she hurried past her, and went off to give some last touches to the dining-room table.

"You might as well be a marble statue, and be done with it!" exclaimed Louise, with her exasperation audible in her tone.

Juliet was somewhat hurt.

"You mean I look stiff and cold?" she said hesitatingly. "I'm sorry. I wanted to look well to-night."

"Oh, you look quite well enough!" replied her prospective sister-in-law, crossly. "They are all raving about you, as you know!"

Even Tommy Norton had asserted privately that "Old Craig's girl was a peach, and no mistake."

But Juliet still looked troubled.

"I should rather have *you* — well, not rave about me, of course! — but approve of me, Louise," she said shyly. "Don't — oh, please don't put me quite so far away!"

Louise hardened her heart.

"It isn't I who have put you far away," she rejoined flippantly. "Brother Craig has set you on a pedestal, where you evidently belong. You must have been born to one! Now, don't look so miserable, my dear. You are a beauty, and I am honestly proud of you, and of having you in the family. But you

must admit, as one girl to another, that it's *too much* to expect me to get enthusiastic over a sister whose shoulders are so much better than mine."

She tripped off forthwith to hunt up the wayward Tommy, who might perchance flirt with that pretty girl from Norfolk if he wasn't watched.

There were tears in Juliet's eyes, but, ashamed of the weakness, she resolutely winked them away. To-night, in this pleasant house, among the gay, kindly people gathered in her honor, she felt forlorn and lonely. She longed to feel herself one of them, longed for the safe and comfortable protection of belonging to some one, heart and soul. She wanted to love Louise as a sister, but the other girl would not allow her to. She wanted, even more eagerly, to care for Craig as a lover and a future husband, but her own heart made that impossible. Something stood between them always.

Since she had determined to take up this new life, she had tried loyally to live it with her whole soul, but she still felt herself detached, unsettled, a failure. Sometimes she thought wistfully of her old sober, independent, and hard-working professional life; but she knew that she had grown too restless and at the same time too weary for it. Was it possible that, at this stage, she — Juliet Gray — was developing nerves?

She steadfastly tried not to recall Liberty Ridge; she firmly thrust away conjectures concerning Derry Blake's whereabouts. She belonged to Craig Evarts

and to his people now, and she truly grieved that, from one cause and another, she could not make herself utterly one with them. Craig himself seemed perfectly happy. Sometimes, to her disgust and self-scorn, she found that his complacent and unanalytical happiness exasperated her!

She looked around the rich, slightly overheated, and overcrowded room, with a sense of heavy depression. She had long since lost the feeling of being in a prison — it was now to her a shelter, but a shelter in which she had not yet found the peace of heart she craved. Yet what more could she wish? The fire blazing on the hearth flashed warmly over the Cordova leather chairs and the handsome bindings of books. If the volumes were a shade too handsome and too fresh, that did not hurt the value of their contents, nor the atmosphere of luxury and refinement which they gave. A leaping flame showed the long oak shelves littered with Tanagra figurines, bits of Chinese jade, some Mexican pottery, and trophies from Africa and British Columbia, Bermuda, and the Amazon.

The Evarts family had a natural leaning toward interesting things. They were not very profoundly cultivated people; in their surroundings Juliet would never find that mellow intellectual and artistic atmosphere which to one of her temperament might in time have taken the place of a freer and fuller life. Their tastes were the leafing and flowering of hardy enthusiasms — very characteristic of the self-educated and self-enriched Young America which is growing up.

The family took an immense interest in things! That was the secret of their energy and cheerfulness and of the unfeigned liking which they had won in society. Juliet had always loved the quality in them; it had kept them from getting spoiled and stuffy and commonplace.

But now she found it impossible to share their interests. Why, she asked herself, should any one care for the skin of a dried lizard from the Nile — now reposing on the bookcase in the corner? And what was the charm of a silver-mounted hourglass in this thoroughly modern room? And then with a shock, she realized that she was growing disdainful, even blasé — *she!* At twenty-five she was losing interest in things! Worse, she was drifting out of sympathy with the wise, sensible folk who remained interested! Why, it was unnatural, horrible! She must get over it, or she might as well be dead and buried already!

She was heavily oppressed with a sort of indefinable dread — a dread of desuetude, a horror of apathy. Which of us has not seen it afar, this icy Shadow, hand in hand with its brothers, Old Age and Despair? To some lucky ones, the Shadow only motions from a distance — this Shadow with the power to kill the freshest bud that ever blew. But with others less fortunate, it walks always, laying a cold hand upon throbbing human blood, and drawing a veil across the radiant mystery of the world. It has no name, this Thing, but it means the end of Youth, and Hope, and Interest in Life. And for the first time

Juliet Gray saw it looking at her that Thanksgiving night.

And then, in this blackest and most dangerous hour of her depression, something happened, and a real fear took the place of the ghostly Terror.

She saw a man looking in at her through the window. The dancing firelight showed her the wild and haggard face, and it was the face of Dan Turley!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHOT

"A great and glorious thing it is
To learn, for seven years or so,
The Lord knows what of that and this,
Ere reckoned fit to face the foe —
The flying bullet down the Pass,
That whistles clear, 'All flesh is grass!'"

RUDYARD KIPLING.

HER quick scream brought Craig Evarts into the room.

"What is it, dear?" he exclaimed.

He went to her quickly. She pointed with a shaking hand. But the face was gone. She covered her eyes in silence.

"Dear, what is it?" Craig repeated gently, putting his arm about her shoulders.

He seldom ventured upon a caress, for he had found her cold and unresponsive, but to-night she leaned toward him like a frightened child.

"A face!" she gasped incoherently. "That horrible old man's face! At the window! He was looking at me." She hid her eyes against his shoulder.

"What horrible old man?"

"Dan Turley. He looked — murderous!"

"Old Turley! You're sure you aren't dreaming, darling?"

He drew her closer into the circle of his arm, but for the time being she hardly took count of the movement.

"It was he; I know it was. And he looked at me as though he were going to kill me."

"What nonsense!" But he was graver now.

"You know — he did try to once." Juliet was doing her best to control her shaking nerves.

Craig started, and stared at her incredulously.

"He did! You never told me anything about that. That'll wait, though. If he was really there, it must be seen to. Darling!"

He bent swiftly and kissed her shoulder, then hurried from the room.

Juliet, standing where he had left her, instantly forgot her terror of a moment ago in a burning revulsion from that kiss. Why should such a trivial thing agitate her so violently? A man had kissed her, a man whom she was to marry —

Suddenly she realized what it would mean to be his wife. She had to fight back a second cry more heartfelt than the first. Then, with a characteristic, swift effort, she brushed it all into the background of her mind, and straightway began to consider the meaning of Dan Turley's appearance at the window of Evartston.

Could he really have been looking for her? Did Kitty still hate her bitterly enough to instigate her murder, and by her father? Or had it become a

fixed idea in that crazed old brain? Robbed of his prey at the eleventh hour, that awful morning on the Ridge, had he become obsessed with the desire to finish the work so murderously begun? Was this dangerous maniac actually waiting and watching for a chance to kill her after all this time?

She remembered that Kitty herself blamed her for her father's illness. Doubtless in her own ignorance, the girl had fed and fostered the unwholesome flame of the old man's half-mad resentment, until who could say how menacing and destructive it had waxed?

Her fear had left her, in the queer, rapid way that her emotions had of fading in emergencies. She went boldly to the long French window, and flung it open.

A light but frigid November wind lashed her face and neck, but she walked out upon the stone terrace, and looked about her in the darkness.

Not a sign of any one. The long slope of the hillside lawn, white with frost, stretched downward, glimmered under the stars. In the stillness the only sound was the puffing of the evening train in the valley, as it came up the Gap.

As she stood there, she heard voices, and Evarts, with two of the men servants, came around the corner of the house.

"Do go in, Juliet!" he exclaimed almost sharply, when he saw her. "You'll be frozen! And besides, if there should be any danger, you should not —"

Even as he spoke, there was a loud report in the icy stillness of the night, and just behind Juliet the

closed half of the French window crashed into pieces under a bullet.

Evarts sprang to the girl's side, satisfied himself that she was unhurt, pushed her inside the room, and dashed into the shrubbery that surrounded the house on one side. He was followed by the two men.

Every one in Evartston had heard the shot, and in a moment the entire lower part of the house was filled with nervous women and eagerly questioning men. All the male guests were soon off in a body to join in the hunt — except Tommy Norton, who had had three cocktails by way of an *apéritif*, and who, not totally grasping the character of the excitement, explained to everybody that "the sight of blood always made him sick, y'know, so he'd be of no manner of use!"

Louise quite unnecessarily clung to him, as though to hold him back from portentous risks.

She herself was hysterical from fear, and also from annoyance at such a horrid interruption to the peaceful festivities of the house party. Miss Alicia, on the contrary, though very nervous, was inclined, on the whole, to rather enjoy the episode. She went around among her guests talking about "these dear, romantic, satisfactory Virginian mountains, where *anything* might happen!"

Juliet's presence of mind remained untouched. Tremulous as she might be under terrors imagined or of the spirit, she was steel and iron when confronted

by genuine and immediate danger. Without the loss of a second, she had drawn the library curtains closely and turned out the electric lights.

"The firelight makes it quite bright enough," she explained, in the matter-of-fact way which is so reassuring, yet so tantalizing to the excited and inexperienced individual. "And there is not the slightest use giving them an absolute target when we don't have to."

"But — how thrilling!" exclaimed Molly Davidge, one of the girl guests.

She was a pretty, round-eyed little person with red hair, who looked like a sentimental fool, but wasn't. She was the sort of young person who always contrives, in all clothes and in all postures, to look like a colored magazine cover.

"Did they really shoot right in here?" she added, making great eyes, from force of habit, though there were no men present.

"Look at my Bokhara rug!" exclaimed Miss Alicia, in answer.

Though her sentence was a lament, she spoke with the lugubrious triumph affected by persons whose property has just been irretrievably ruined. As she spoke, she pointed to the beautiful rug which hung on the library wall, and which had been badly rent by the bullet.

They all exclaimed at that, in varying degrees of awe, consternation, and sympathy.

"It'th a lovely rug!" sighed Miss Chiswick, the

pretty girl from Norfolk. She sighed often, and had a bewitching lisp.

But Miss Davidge was more practical.

"That's all right!" she said vigorously. "But whom or what were they shooting at?"

"Juliet was the only person in the room!" exclaimed Louise. "Oh, Juliet — have you a rejected lover, hidden among the hills, who has gone mad with jealousy — or anything like that?"

"Your brother was only a little distance away from me," said Juliet, hurriedly. She could not have told herself why she wanted, instantly and instinctively, to lead the talk away from the subject. She should be proof against such slight and inconsiderable attacks, and yet —

Louise saw that she had colored slowly and painfully. The sight started a new train of thought. Was she really as simple and frank as she looked and seemed — this tall, fair girl whom her brother was to marry? Were there, after all, elements and episodes in her life about which she had said nothing to her future in-laws? Louise was rather pleased than otherwise to think that she might perhaps "find out something" about Juliet Gray. Suppose she had a story!

No one else, however, noticed anything out of the way in her attitude.

"Why, then it may have been Mr. Evarts they wanted to shoot!" exclaimed Molly Davidge — in real horror now, for she had always fancied Craig

Evarts, and had tried, and failed, to get him the season before.

Evarts himself appeared at this juncture, with two of the visiting men. The others, with the servants, were still beating the Evartston bushes in search of the criminal.

"Can't find anything," he said. "Juliet, are you sure it was Turley you saw at the window?"

The others listened, mystified.

"As sure as I can possibly be of anything," said Juliet, promptly.

"What's all this?" demanded Miss Alicia.

Evarts explained briefly that Juliet had seen a man at the library window before the shooting. He added decidedly: —

"As long as you are certain, I'll send at once and get out a warrant for his arrest."

"Don't arrest him," said Molly Davidge, shrewdly, "till you've given him time to get home!"

"Right, Miss Davidge!" She was pretty, and Evarts threw her an admiring glance, gratefully received. "Now, Juliet, tell me, if you please, when it was that he frightened you before."

Juliet thought swiftly, and realized overwhelmingly that she could never tell that story — to Craig, of all people! How could she decently explain her visit to the Turley house, their wish to keep her a prisoner till after the time appointed for the signal, Kitty's enmity, and its reason? Louise saw her hesitation.

"I — I went up to the Turleys' house," Juliet said

at last, rather lamely. "And Mr. Turley got rather violent. He had been drinking too much, and he made some threats. That's all."

"And quite enough, too!" exclaimed Evarts. "By Jove, Juliet — why didn't you tell some one about this before?"

Juliet flushed. She had not talked about the incident because she did not want to be too closely questioned about her doings on Liberty Ridge, and she knew it.

"He was just drunk," she said. "I — I didn't think any more about it."

But Louise had been watching her. Now she spoke.

"What did you go to such a creature's house for?" she now asked point-blank.

Juliet paled as quickly as she had flushed.

"I wanted Miss Turley to do something for me," she answered simply and truthfully.

Before Louise could say anything more, there was a shout outside.

"Gad! I believe they've got him!" exclaimed Evarts, and darted to the window. "Turn on the lights, please, somebody!"

Molly switched them full on, helpfully prompt and happy to serve her idol. Excited voices were heard talking, and hasty footsteps on the stone flagging outside.

"It's all right, Evarts!" cried Charlie Moss, one of the guests, thrusting his flushed and excited face

into the room. "We've got the fellow. He nearly made a get-away, but we nabbed him."

"Are you sure it's the man?" demanded Evarts.

"Rather! Why, if you please, he's confessed. Seems to glory in it, by Jove! Says that he wanted to pot you, and not the lady, though. Come on boys, trot him in."

And a man was dragged into the bright, crowded room — a man with a shifty look and white, unhealthy face.

To Juliet's blank astonishment, it was her late patient, Nat Mooney!

CHAPTER XIX

SURPRISES

> " . . . When some one spoke his name,
> From my swift blood that went and came
> A thousand little shafts of flame
> Were shivered . . ."
>
> ALFRED TENNYSON.

JULIET fell back with an involuntary exclamation of surprise. Her head whirled with bewilderment. So it was not Dan Turley, after all, who had attempted her life! Yet she had seen Dan's face, and no other, at the window. She could not have imagined so sinister and at the same time so unexpected a vision. And why in the world should Nat Mooney want to kill her? She knew that he was a flabby creature, in mind as well as in flesh — heavy, slow-moving, weak, and vicious by nature. It was difficult to understand how he could have brought himself to an attempted murder. Then she recalled that he had "drawn" on Derry Blake while the latter's back was turned, and the thing became conceivable. Yes, Mooney would kill, if he could kill secretly, in the dark. Her soul sickened at the sight of the puffy white face.

Then, with an effort, she dispelled the mists of wonder and conjecture which were filling her brain,

and listened to the curious little impromptu court of inquiry which was being held in that brilliant library, with the white-faced guests and servants standing about.

"So you admit," said Evarts, crisply and sternly, "that it was you, Mooney, who fired the shot?"

"Yes."

The man's eye and voice were alike sullen. He hung his head, and his loose lips worked nervously. But there could be seen no abortive impulse to deny the accusation. "Yes," he said again, as if by reiteration he wished to end his examination.

"Did you shoot to kill?" said Charlie Moss.

"Yes." The same heavy, sulky voice. "Yes." The same repetition.

"Any one in particular, or just general target shooting?" The words were jesting, but the tone was not.

"Yes."

"Did you mean to kill me?" asked Juliet, suddenly, in a clear voice.

"No," said the man, as sullenly as he had spoken before. But after he had said it he raised his eyes and looked at her, and she saw in his glance the gleam of an almost fanatical hatred. She shivered a little, for she knew at once that, whatever he might say now, it had been herself that he had wanted to kill.

But Evarts was looking at her in surprise.

"Of course, it wasn't you he was aiming at, Juliet," he exclaimed.

"All very well, but it went confoundedly close to her," said Moss.

"It's absurd!" said Evarts, impatiently. "You don't understand, Charlie. Miss Gray nursed this fellow through all the complications of a bad gunshot wound, and —"

"Oh, is that the man?" gasped Miss Alicia, in a voice shrill with nerves and interest. "I'm glad he was shot!"

Nat flung her a malevolent glance. One or two of the others laughed a little hysterically.

"It's absurd," Evarts repeated. "What object could he have? Come, Mooney, speak up like a man —"

"Like a what?" murmured Ramsay, another guest, in a contemptuous undertone. "Faugh! The thing's a worm, not a man!"

"Speak up, I tell you, and tell us who you were aiming at just now."

The prisoner's clumsy brain appeared to be working now, albeit slowly and laboriously. His mouth twisted uneasily, and his gaze shifted from point to point of the carpet pattern. Evidently he feared to make an unconsidered answer.

"I wasn't aimin' at no one in partic'lar," he said at last. "I was just shootin' at — at the window."

"Target practice, eh — just as I thought?" suggested Charlie Moss.

"Willing to take anything he could get!" added Ramsay, with an indignant laugh.

But Evarts looked grave.

"You were shooting at some one inside the window, then?" he said.

Nat nodded.

"But the room was empty when he fired," said Juliet, quickly.

"Some one," Evarts continued, "that you could not see, but thought might be there?"

"Yes," answered Nat.

"Most unlikely!" commented Ramsay, skeptically.

"Look here, Mooney," said Evarts, point-blank. "who was it you wanted to shoot?"

"You!" returned Nat Mooney — this time without hesitation.

Evarts made a gesture of hopeless bewilderment.

"But why, man, why?" he demanded, staring. "What have you against me? I have never done anything to you, have I?"

"You had me fired!" said Nat, glibly — almost too glibly. After his uncertainty and hesitation, the prompt fluency of his present answers suggested to every one the easy ground of a lesson learned.

"And you wanted to kill me for that?" said Evarts, taken aback.

"Yes!" Nat was traveling smoothly now. "I was goin' to get married, and you took my job away. And I wanted to kill you for it."

"I see." Evarts still stared at him, nonplused. "Of course, you never thought of coming to me first. Never had any idea of making any sort of appeal, eh?"

"No." Nat was obstinate. "I wanted to kill you for it."

"Good Lord!" said Evarts, helplessly.

"Well!" ejaculated Ramsay. "Of all the infernal, venomous —"

"We don't argue in Virginia, one perceives!" said Charlie Moss, dryly. "We just shoot first to be on the safe side, and discuss the thing afterward — if there's any one alive to discuss it with!"

"Oh — rotten!" muttered Tommy Norton, which was all he could think of to say, and, after all, not wholly inappropriate as a comment.

"Now, then, Mooney, pay attention!" said Evarts, brusquely. "Do you pretend you aimed at me, just now?"

"Yes — no!" Nat corrected himself emphatically; but he looked once more at Juliet. "I just thought — just thought you might be there."

"H'm! Lame!" said Ramsay.

"There's something darned queer about the whole thing," said Moss.

"He fired at me, I am sure," broke in Juliet, quietly and composedly. "He has always disliked me, and —"

She stopped short. If she should explain that he was a tool of Kitty Turley, and that Kitty was her bitter enemy, she would have to further explain the cause of the bitterness. She flushed faintly, under the inquiring looks that were being directed toward her.

"Why should he want to shoot you?" said Evarts. "It's like an endless chain. I feel as if we must all be crazy!"

"Yes, Juliet!" chimed in Louise, with an interest that sounded absolutely hungry. "What ill turn have you ever done the man?"

Her eyes sparkled. Was this the way to her future sister's secret? Was she even now on the point of surprising something thrilling and hitherto undivulged. But Juliet's blue eyes were clear and calm as they met hers, and any one less feather-brained must have felt ashamed under their candid gaze.

"No ill turn, Louise," said Juliet, gently. "I truly believe that I have done no one an ill turn in all my life — *no one!*" she repeated, looking now straight at Nat Mooney.

"But you said," persisted Louise, "that you were quite sure he had fired at you!"

"I was standing on the terrace outside the window," replied Juliet. "The bullet passed directly over my shoulder."

"And Evarts was nowhere near?" queried Ramsay.

"I was coming around the house, ten feet away from Miss Gray," explained Evarts. "By Jove, Juliet!" he added vehemently. "We've been forgetting that face you saw at the window!"

"Yes," said Juliet. She had not, as a matter of fact, forgotten it for a second.

"Do you still insist that it was old Turley's?"

"Yes." She was conscious that Nat had started at the words, and was now watching her more keenly than was usual with him.

"There wasn't a sign of any one else on the place!" declared Charlie Moss, with rash positiveness.

Evarts, however, shook his head.

"You don't know these mountain crooks in the South," he said, unconvinced and dubious. "They can slip through trees like ghosts, and burrow in the ground like rabbits or snakes."

Juliet changed color at the simile. The suggestion of burrowing underground always made her start. And the start puzzled the watchful Louise. What association could Juliet possibly have with rabbits or snakes?

It was just at this moment that the noise of cart wheels and a smartly trotting horse made itself audible from without.

"Mercy!" cried Miss Alicia, suddenly tumbling out of a delicious mixture of crime and romance into the world of everyday. "That's Doctor Clement, come to eat his Thanksgiving dinner with us, as he promised. And I'm certain that everything will be spoiled by waiting so long."

"Oh, but," pleaded Molly Davidge, "we can have Thanksgiving dinners every year, Miss Evarts! And we may never again have an attempted murder in the house."

"Gracious! I hope not!" exclaimed Louise, devoutly. "What are you going to do with — with

that man, Craig?" She regarded Nat with vast distaste.

"I'll telephone for some one to come over and run him in right away," Evarts assured her. "Meanwhile —"

"Meanwhile," his aunt interrupted emphatically, "you will lock him up somewhere, please, where we don't have to look at him! And then you will kindly come to dinner."

She was shaken, but defiant. Juliet, obeying an accustomed instinct, went to her at once, with a murmured proffer of valerian and ammonia. But the intrepid lady held her head high, as she remarked, in stern, though tremulous accents: "Stuff, my dear! I'm through taking your disgusting nostrums — and you're through giving 'em, thank God! Not at all! I shall drink my champagne at dinner, like a Christian! That's all I need! There's that doctor, now!"

"What on earth —" began Doctor Clement, blinking at the assembled company in a dazed fashion from the library doorway.

Miss Evarts rustled forward to meet him.

"I don't wonder you stare!" she remarked.

"Is it a charade?" he demanded quizzically, as he shook hands.

"Hardly!" said his hostess, dryly. "It came close to being an inquest! But Miss Gray will tell you; you take her in. I believe in letting people talk shop if they want to, so I've paired off my doctor and

nurse. Children, my terrapin came from Baltimore this afternoon; if you don't want it to be ruined — come and eat."

The doctor smiled at Juliet with frank and friendly admiration, as they went down the hall together.

"It is many years since I have been a reader of poetry," he said, "but I used to know my Tennyson with any man, and I recall to-night a description of the Princess Ida." He quoted: —

> "Liker to the inhabitant
> Of some clear planet close upon the sun,
> Than our man's earth; such eyes were in her head,
> And so much grace and power."

Juliet smiled gently at him. She had a warm liking for the doctor, and felt at ease with him. She had hardly recognized him in evening dress, but his abrupt yet mellow speech was the same as it had been in the shack on Liberty Ridge.

With a shock she realized that he was inextricably associated with the Ridge and its happenings. Was that why she liked to be with him? Banishing the supposition, she began to tell him hurriedly of the episode just past.

The recital was interrupted by the usual hunting for places when they had reached the dining room. And by the time Juliet had finished it, they were consuming a wonderful Russian soup flavored with caviare, the recipe for which Miss Evarts had obtained by richly bribing a chef once employed in the Winter Palace.

"Wonderful!" said the doctor, tasting appreciatively. "Ambrosial! These Evartses are extraordinary! I have never known such cosmopolitan creatures. They have soup from Russia, and fur rugs from Alaska, and silver from old England, and manners from New York."

"All in one room!" broke in Juliet, a little acidly.

"Ah!" said the doctor, catching the implication. "I dare say the collection is a bit indiscriminate. But they are nice people."

"They are dears!" said the girl, ashamed of herself.

"I hear," said Doctor Clement, with a keen yet kindly glance, "that you are going to marry Craig?"

"Yes; in April. Doctor Clement, you have not made a single comment on our dramatic — I mean our melodramatic — incident in the library to-night. What do you think of it?"

"I suppose Kitty made him do it," remarked the doctor, tranquilly, plying his soup spoon.

Juliet flushed, and then paled.

"Why should she want to — to kill me?" she asked, speaking out boldly.

Doctor Clement did not answer for a moment. Then, laying down his spoon, he turned to her, and said, with a grave look: "I don't quite know, Miss Gray, but — I suspect. There have been several things to make me suspect. I am a man who is used to making deductions, and concluding a great deal from very little. You must remember that diagnosis is based purely upon deduction. I have always

thought that doctors ought to make excellent detectives. Well, I know that there is some bitter feeling between you and Kitty Turley — on her side, at least," he added, as Juliet made an impulsive, protesting movement. "Now, I think — I am not sure, mind you — but I think that I know the cause for that. In a little while I expect to be quite sure."

The doctor slowly sipped his sherry, and did not look at her for several moments, but Juliet's heart began to beat faster. Derry's name had never been mentioned between them. What could he know? Yet somehow, indubitably, she felt that he did know. Had Ed talked? Or Kitty? Or was it merely a chance shot of divination?

She plunged past the matter bravely.

"You know," she said, breathing quickly, "I am perfectly certain that it was Kitty's father looking at me through the window this evening! Such a horrible, horrible face!" She shuddered at the remembrance.

"He is mad!" said the doctor, trenchantly. "Not, unfortunately, mad enough, as a rule, to be locked up by the authorities. No one but his daughter could commit him, and she will not. I have told her many times that she should do so. Some day he will kill somebody."

"Do you think it was he and not Nat Mooney who fired at me to-night?" asked Juliet.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Who can say that? Mooney is quite capable of

it, for that matter. He does whatever Kitty tells him to, without thinking of questioning it — in fact, both those men do. And, as I have said, Kitty detests you. As a matter of fact," pursued the doctor, calmly, "I met them both on the valley road this evening — both Kitty and her father."

"On your way here?" exclaimed Juliet.

"On my way here."

"But," she cried, "they — they must have been coming from this place."

"Not necessarily, but I think it highly probable."

"Oh, why didn't you tell us that before?"

"You forget," the doctor reminded her, "I have only just heard the facts of the case. I shall tell Craig after dinner. I suppose Mooney is safely shut up?"

"I suppose so. Yes, I know that one of the footmen is watching him. Doctor Clement, did you talk to Kitty and her father when you met them?"

"No; at least, only a word. They slunk by me in the shadows, and I suspected they had been up to some mischief. A wild, dangerous pair, Miss Gray! I shouted a good evening to them as I passed, but they did not answer."

Ramsay, who sat on Juliet's right, spoke to her, and reluctantly she abandoned the doctor to Miss Alicia. When she could turn to him again, the famous terrapin and the turkey had both been demolished.

"Doctor Clement," she said with some hesitation, "I wish that you would tell me what you meant just

now — about suspecting the cause for the Turley girl's dislike of me." She faltered, and then added: "And — and why you expected soon to be sure."

The doctor looked at her. Very pale, with her bare white shoulders, there was something finely classical about her, like abstract womanhood made concrete and yet immortal in marble. Dignity, proud and sweet, was in the carriage of the young head weighted with its smoothly coiled hair. The lips were firm and a trifle sad. A very lovely creature, Doctor Clement thought, with tremendous possibilities in her. He remembered her dancing eyes that morning on the Ridge, when he told her about Chicken Sam and the devil. Striking farther back into his memory, he recalled her white-lipped, passionately determined face lifted to him from beside Nat Mooney's bunk, where she had been fighting a superhuman battle with hovering Death.

"It is rumored," said the doctor, slowly and quietly, "that Derry Blake has come back."

For the first and last time in her life Juliet fainted away.

CHAPTER XX

LOUISE AS A CONSPIRATOR

"Headdresses, then, of any fashion
Bore names of Quality or Passion. . . .
'Prudence' she felt was somewhat small; . . .
'Retirement' seemed the Eyes to hide;
'Content,' at once, she cast aside.
'Simplicity'—'twas out of place;
'Devotion' for an older face. . . .
'Quick! Bring me that! . . . And this you call—?'
'Ill-Nature, Madame; it fits all!'"

AUSTIN DOBSON.

JULIET was lying, half an hour later, on the rose-colored couch in Miss Alicia's morning room. All the lights were turned out, save one, and the curtains pushed widely open to let in all possible air. Her eyes, with rather a wild look in them, were fixed on the indefinite dark of the night outside.

The faintness had passed, leaving a tremulous tensity of nerves which frightened her. She had never felt like this before. She was sick and cold, shaken to the depths of her being. Of course, she knew that she had been through enough to have broken down the composure and the fortitude of any ordinary woman. But she knew, too, that she was not an ordinary woman. She was not paying in reaction for

any ordeal which was past; she was, on the contrary, vibrating with the actual strain of the present, and with the imagined possibilities of the future.

Apathy, loss of interest, resignation, and that content which is really the offspring of hopelessness — these things had fled before the shattering knowledge that Derry was somewhere near her.

She loved him, she wanted him, and, even while loving and wanting him, she dreaded frantically to see him. Never had she dreamed that such tumult could exist in a human heart as wrenched hers that night. Something deeply planted in her stirred and thrilled to its roots, and the resultant upheaval made her very spirit sick. As the ground cracks in an earthquake, as the sea is convulsed by a waterspout, so was she rent and shaken by the emotional cataclysm that swept her.

Out of the diverse feelings that fought and strove together within her, one rose like a strange blind rage — the fury of thwarted human passion. For the first time in her life Juliet acknowledged straightly to herself that of all the men on earth Derry was hers — her mate, her other self; and never, never could another human creature take his place in the living core of her heart. She would have given twenty years of her life for the right to go away with him to the uttermost ends of the earth.

And she was going to marry Craig Evarts in April.

Louise came in with a tiny glass of *fine champagne*, and a cup of black coffee.

"Aunt Alicia recommends these," she announced. "And do you want a sweet?"

Juliet shook her head with a shudder, but drank the coffee thirstily.

"Are you really better?" asked Louise, not unkindly.

"Oh, much better," Juliet said eagerly. "Quite well really."

"You look awfully white still," was Louise's comment.

"Oh, well, when one has been faint ——"

Suddenly Juliet put out her hand and caught Louise's. The grasp was hot and hard, and the other girl looked down at her curiously.

"Louise!" said Juliet, almost choking. "I am — very miserable!"

Louise never knew how close she was in that minute to receiving the confidence for which she was so desirous. She was not an imaginative nor a very sympathetic person.

"Oh, you'll be all right to-morrow, I dare say," she responded cheerfully. "You must make an effort, you know."

Juliet fell back upon the couch, with a wry smile, and thought of Mrs. Dombey and another "Louisa." Already she was wondering at her own thought of confiding in Craig's sister. Such mad impulses, born of the soul's abysmal loneliness, are the reasons for betrayals and confessions.

"I don't know why I should have been so foolish,"

she said in quite a different tone. And Louise thought that she referred to the faintness.

"I dare say you've been upset about something?" she suggested. But the impulsive moment and her chance were alike gone.

"I think I am just a little tired, that's all," said Juliet. "And then, to be sure, one doesn't altogether like being shot at!"

"Rather not!" said Louise, in an unconscious imitation of dear Tommy. "But you must be all right by to-morrow without fail," she added. "You haven't forgotten that Craig's having those games and things for us?"

"Oh, but I had! I had forgotten them entirely! The games — dear me, of course!" Juliet moved a little wearily on her cushions.

Following an old custom of the neighborhood, Craig had gotten up a sort of contest in athletics, — running, jumping, wrestling, weight-throwing, and horsemanship, — in which many men of the community, including his own workmen, were entered. It was open to all, and the prizes were sums of money ranging from twenty-five dollars to one hundred — no small matter to these impoverished mountaineers. Such tests of strength and skill had often been held for a pool made up by the county people themselves, but it was the first time that Craig had instigated it. It was his fancy to have his guests and Juliet see an event singularly representative of the oddly informal sporting spirit of the wilder regions of Virginia.

"I had forgotten all about it," the girl repeated. "But I shall be all right by to-morrow, I'm sure. Go down, Louise. I don't need anything."

"A cigarette?" asked Louise, generously proffering her own turquoise-studded case.

"No, thanks; I hate them."

"Of course you would. You're such a deadly conventional person!" said Louise, rather irritably.

Juliet wondered what she would have thought if she had seen her excursion into the bowels of the earth to meet Derry Blake. The stigma "conventional" struck her as quaintly inapplicable to her; and she laughed, faintly and enigmatically, at the idea of it.

All, however, that she said was: "I shall be all right. Do go down to the others."

And, after repowdering her eternally shining nose, Louise fluttered off. She usually appeared to flutter when she hurried. She was, indeed, rather like a plump bird, and her clothes were apt to suggest brilliant, slightly ruffled plumage..

She wriggled with silent exasperation as she made her way down the big staircase. What a difficult, unsatisfactory person her brother's fiancée was! she thought. So different from other people, and so impossible to understand!

As she came down into the main hall, she saw Hawkins, the young English under footman, sitting outside the locked room which held Nat Mooney. The manservant looked frightened, though the door

was made fast on the outside, and there was no possibility of the prisoner's escape. Louise noticed that poor Hawkins had a gun across his knees. He saw her glance, and explained apologetically: —

"It's honly a shotgun, miss — but I thought as hit would be better than nothin'!"

"Why, he can't get out, Hawkins!" Louise assured him, laughing. "Are you afraid he will?"

The footman shook his head solemnly.

"I wouldn't put it past 'm, miss!" he said. "'E's a desp'rate character, and no mistike."

Louise was by nature inquisitive. Also, she dearly loved anything resembling a show. She now became seized with a desire to look at the "desp'rate character" in captivity. It might even be practicable to speak with him, without the danger of being reproved or derided by those who did not understand the fascinations of the criminal! Other women — many of them — feel the same way, as the prison wardens can testify.

She knew that the little cloakroom in which Nat was confined had only one window, too high and too small to serve as a means of escape, but quite adequate for a good view of him. Could she climb up to it without trouble? She could, and she would.

She stood still and considered. The others were laughing and talking in the drawing room, and would not miss her. She took a cape from a hook in the hall closet, and strolled carelessly down the corridor to a glass door, opening on to the narrow side veranda.

In a few moments she had pulled a low wooden settle under the little window, mounted on the seat, and was peering into the cloakroom. The window opened inward, and was ajar. She pushed it noiselessly, and looked down at the "desp'rate character."

The room was brilliantly lighted. The sight of the would-be murderer sitting hunched up on a chair against the wall filled her silly feminine soul with excited interest. With a thrill at her own daring, she resolved to speak to him forthwith. What was his name? Oh, yes!

"Mr. — Mr. Mooney!" she called softly.

Nat lifted his puffy white face toward the window.

Now that she had spoken, Louise did not know what else to say to the man. "I — I hope you're comfortable," was the banal remark with which she proceeded.

Nat's heavy, pale eyes, after some traveling about, finally fixed themselves on her face, just dimly visible in the small, dark square of the window, high above him. He had no idea who she was, but the fact of her addressing him thus conversationally suggested to his primitive intelligence a girl of his own class — one of the servants, most likely, he said to himself.

"Say!" he blurted. "How much'll you take to get me out of this?"

Louise did not understand him at first.

"Get you out of this!" she repeated stupidly. Then, light breaking upon her, she exclaimed: "You must mean that you want me to help you to escape!"

"Sure! I'll make it worth your while!"

"You'll make it worth my while?"

"Sure! Pay you! Say, are you nutty or anything?"

"But — *you'll* pay *me!*" gasped Louise, not knowing whether to laugh or to frown.

"Sure," he reiterated yet again. "I ain't got much myself, but I — I know an old chap that has plenty salted away, and I reckon he'll have to stand by me in this deal. *They* got me into it!"

"So you yourself didn't want to do it?" queried Louise, scenting a story.

"I don't like her, but at that I ain't got enough against her myself to shoot her up," said Nat, sulkily.

Instantly he realized that he had made a break, had admitted something foreign to his own testimony of two hours ago. He looked up hastily, as though to explain it, but it was too late. Already Louise had caught at the unexpected pronoun.

"'Her!'" she exclaimed. "Then it *was* Juliet — Miss Gray — that you fired at! And somebody made you do it! How awfully exciting!"

Nat scowled, and had the sense to say nothing further for the moment.

"Do tell me all about it!" urged Louise, breathlessly. She was almost toppling off the settle in her pleasurable agitation.

But the man had begun to suspect that he had made a mistake. Perhaps she wasn't a bribable housemaid, after all, this unprecedented girl who crawled half up the side of the house to talk to him through the

window. At any rate, he was loath to commit himself further, and he was stubbornly silent.

Louise was tingling with exhilaration. She had scented a story, but behold! it was a drama! All her worldly little life she had yearned to figure in something dramatic. Things novel and thrilling were unfolding before her, and, besides, unless she was much mistaken, here to her hand was the key to Juliet's secret trouble, whatever it was. A little diplomacy and patience, such as the heroines of melodramas so easily exerted, and she would be able to show up Craig's fiancée in her true colors — how Louise hoped that they were sufficiently lurid — and break up that horrid match which was menacing her happiness and the livelihood of Tommy Norton.

To these ends she began eagerly to polish her somewhat blunt wits, and said, with what she conceived to be a triumph of cunning: —

"I suppose the — the person who wanted you to — to do it, hates Miss Gray dreadfully?"

"I guess so," was the surly and unsatisfying response.

"I wonder — why does he hate her so?" added Louise, with elephantine guile.

For a moment Nat forgot that he was being pumped.

"I don't know why either of them hate her," he said stupidly. "But they sure do."

The persistent use of the plural puzzled his interlocutor. But she was elated by the readiness with which the man assumed her knowledge of the situation.

A dead leaf blew across the piazza, and she drew back, frightened and embarrassed; but there was nothing to disturb her; so, after a moment, she put her face once more to the tempting aperture.

"Which of them," she said boldly, "is the one who made you shoot?"

"Kitty!" said the man, harshly. "There's no one but Kitty could make me take this sort of a fool chance!"

Louise felt her heart leap. "Kitty!" That must be Kitty Turley. Kitty hated Juliet, then — Kitty had inspired that murderous shot! But why? Why? Louise was half suffocated by her own excitement. At last she was a principal in a full-fledged, flesh-and-blood dramatic adventure! The possibilities danced like alluring imps in her brain.

She gave a furtive glance about her, then again thrust her face toward him.

"I should like to see — Kitty!" She whispered the words, but quite audibly. "I am Miss Louise Evarts — Mr. Evarts' sister. You won't forget?"

"Mr. Evarts' sis — Gawd!" said Nat Mooney.

"Hush! Don't forget! I must see Kitty Turley." She paused, then added impressively: "Tell her it's about — about ——"

"The nurse?" said Mooney, with striking intelligence.

"Yes, the nurse!" Somehow, Louise was glad that she did not have to mention Juliet's name.

She was about to withdraw, when Nat stopped her with a hasty growl: —

"Hold on a minute, ma'am! If you're Miss Evarts, how is it you're so down on — on her?"

"I — why —" stammered Louise, nonplused. "I'm not down on her."

"Sure you are!" he insisted gruffly.

"Indeed, I'm not! Why, she's going to marry my brother! Only — only — you see, she's rather an odd lady, and there are some things I don't understand about her, and —"

She stopped, chagrined at what she was doing — trying to justify herself to this — this creature!

"See here, ma'am," said Nat Mooney, in his slow and surly way, "you don't want her to marry your brother, do you?"

Louise hesitated, then savagely said, "No!"

"That's all right! You'd like powerful well to know somethin' or other that'd break up the whole thing — eh?"

Again Louise hesitated, and again she succumbed.

"Yes!" she whispered, and felt that she had irrevocably committed herself to a conspiracy.

"*That's* all right! Now, I don't know anything myself, but I guess Kitty does."

"I want to see her."

"And that's all right! But I've got to get away myself first." He looked at her with his pale, sly eyes. "And that's up to you, ma'am!"

Without a word, she slipped down from the window, moved the settle away with noiseless care, and walked thoughtfully into the house.

Hawkins was standing up, pale, and more scared than ever.

"'E's a-talkin' to 'imself, miss!" he exclaimed, in a frightened undertone.

"'E keeps a-talkin' to 'imself!"

"Who does he suppose he's talking to, I wonder?" said Louise, with bravado.

"I can't say, miss. But I 'eard 'im s'y 'Gawd' out loud. M'ybe' e's pr'yin!"

Louise laughed hysterically.

"I should think it was very likely," she said. "Hawkins, don't you want to go and get some pudding? I'm sure they'll eat it all up in the kitchen, unless you go and put in a claim."

"I — I 'ardly like to, miss." He cast a regretful glance at the door, clearly torn between duty and a national love for pudding.

"Rubbish! The key's this side, and I'm not a bit afraid to take your place for a few minutes."

Hawkins slipped gratefully away, and returned in five minutes' time, still licking his lips surreptitiously.

"Thank you very kindly, miss," he said with fervent appreciation.

"Oh, not at all, Hawkins," returned Louise, graciously. "You've nothing to thank *me* for." Which was very, very true.

She betook herself forthwith in a leisurely and nonchalant manner to the drawing room, where she entered with great zest into the general merrymaking.

When, an hour later, Juliet proved her constitution and her pluck by descending, with carefully rearranged hair and set smile, she found the house in a fresh turmoil. They had just discovered that in some inexplicable fashion Nat Mooney had escaped.

CHAPTER XXI

"THE GAMES"

> "Waken, lords and ladies gay,
> On the mountain dawns the day! . . .
> Tell them youth and mirth and glee
> Run a course as well as we;
> Time, stern huntsman! who can baulk? . . .
> Think of this, and rise with day,
> Gentle lords and ladies gay!"
>
> WALTER SCOTT.

"OH, dear!" cried Molly Davidge. "I never saw such darling, rough men! And wasn't it wonderful of Mr. Evarts to get it all up for us?"

She was adorable in a scarlet sweater and slouch hat, being one of those very feminine small girls who look the more piquant for knockabout clothes. "If I were five feet eight, and had a long nose," she was wont to explain, "I should have to wear fluffy things, so that people would know I really was a girl! As it is—" The sentence never required the trouble of finishing. This morning, set in the brilliant blue and golden November day, she was charming enough to draw Craig Evarts' eyes to hers several times. He was completely in love with Juliet Gray, but he was young and human, and Molly was a pretty thing to look at.

Juliet herself was in cool, severe gray, that took the

blue out of her eyes, and killed the last trace of pink in her cheeks. Her head rose from her gray squirrel collar like a study in white and gold framed in silver. Her hat, gray squirrel, too, fitted into the absolute simplicity and severity of the whole effect.

Louise, overdressed as usual in several colors, among which ultramarine predominated, resented the graceful sobriety of the gray costume, just as she resented the carriage of Juliet's head, and the quality of her skin.

"There's no one that can touch her!" she said to herself, despairingly echoing her brother's proud verdict. "All the rest of us look either like frumps or show girls beside her. And in that abominable gray thing, at that!"

Juliet was not, however, looking her best that crystal bright Friday morning. She had not slept, and her mind and body were alike weary. The escape of Nat Mooney filled her with apprehension. She knew that, however problematical might be his enmity toward herself, there could be no doubt at all as to the bitterness of his feeling against Derry Blake, the man who had shot him on Liberty Ridge. With her own ears she had heard Nat promise himself Derry's death times out of number — threats spoken in delirium, to be sure, but none the less the expression of the man's revengeful intent. With Nat at liberty, and Derry in the neighborhood, she felt that some sort of tragic climax was imminent; and the thought filled her with anxiety.

In vain she reminded herself that Derry Blake's safety was not — could not be — any concern of hers; in vain she crushed down that poignant emotion of terror for him with which she had once before been so painfully familiar. It made no difference; Derry was in danger, and the fact filled her with a torture so deep and pervading as to be akin to physical hurt. It was as though some part of herself were menaced by the rack or the flame. She felt his peril in the nerves of her own body.

Such, she perceived in the enlightenment of suffering, was the nature of strong human love. The colorless, idyllic dreams of her girlhood faded; she knew at last that love, while no whit less spiritual than she had conceived it, was infinitely more violent and penetrating. It covered so much — so much — nay, it covered everything! There was no room in all the rocking universe for anything else.

She watched the games with unseeing eyes. These queer little puppets, gyrating, jumping, running, throwing things — were they real, or only the phantasmagoria of dreams? And were these indeed voices all about her, laughing, commenting, applauding? Or were they merely her own pulses beating in her ears? She sat like a statue, with the splendid sunlight pouring down upon her; and after a little time the merry party gave up trying to talk to her, her tone was so unresponsive, her look so remote.

The games were held on a big plateau just above the Evartston House. Evarts had long ago had the

ground leveled off with great trouble and expense, with a view to tennis courts and croquet grounds; but characteristically he had lost interest before the grading was finished. His enthusiasms were too numerous to be long-lived.

The flat, smooth place served excellently for these informal sports, and the picture was a pretty one — the level expanse of russet turf three hundred by one hundred feet in size; the hillside rising sharply behind; the brown November woods, turned to bronze and copper by the alchemy of the noon sun; the dead leaves like points of tarnished silver as they fluttered, glittering, in the wind.

Showing up strikingly against this background were the spectators and participants of the day's events — groups of roughly dressed, tanned men, workmen and mountaineers; their bunch of sturdy horses, untrimmed for the most part, but fit enough, and, with their light saddles and alert glance, palpably ready for the fun; country carts and buckboards, filled with children and mountain women, little knots of grinning darkies, men and girls; and the Evartston crowd, with a few invited guests from the hotels in the valley, making an odd little note of civilization in the general effect of rude and rustic festivity.

A shout of laughter went up from the sides of the little field.

"Oh, do look!" cried Molly, with a little shriek of amusement. "Did you ever see anything so funny?"

Chicken Sam, a fat and serious young negro, had apparently constituted himself the clown of the occasion. With feet and legs tied up in flour sacks, he and another youthful darky were running or, rather, jumping a comic race. Their black faces shone, their eyes rolled frantically from the exertion, their arms waved, and their absurd, unwieldy, bouncing movements made them figures of fun, and delighted the lookers-on.

"Why, they don't look human!" declared Miss Alicia, her lorgnon glued to her nose.

"Ithn't it hoptoadth they're like?" lisped Miss Chiswick.

"They're too galumphing," said Charlie Moss. "Hoptoads don't galumph!"

"And such a lovely name as the fat one has!" gurgled Molly. "Mr. Evarts told me. It's Chicken Sam. *Chicken!* Oh, isn't it too wonderful?"

Louise gave an impatient wriggle.

"You call every single thing 'wonderful,' Molly," she complained.

"Well," retorted pretty Molly, cheerily, "every single thing *is* wonderful! So there!"

She beamed on the world generously as she spoke.

Much clapping of hands arose as Chicken, with a high negro yell, jumped his own length across the finishing line, and tumbled in a heap, the victor. The vanquished darky sat down where he was, and regarded him disconsolately. Extricating himself from the flour sack with difficulty, Chicken grinned

delightedly at the spectators, and waved aloft a grubby-looking little cotton bag.

"It done worked!" he chortled. "Mah cunjer bag he done worked! Dat was a plumb good voodoo Ah done las' night!"

"What is he talking about?" said Ramsay, curiously.

"Black magic," said Doctor Clement, who was standing beside him. "That fellow probably sat up all night preparing a luck bag, so that he'd be sure to win to-day."

"Wonderful!" breathed Molly, automatically. "How do they make them?"

"Be glad you haven't seen them," the doctor told her, with a grimace. "They take some rats' brains and a rattlesnake's fang and a piece of skin torn from a live cat and —"

"Oh, how impossibly disgusting!" Molly put her fingers in her ears.

"Fact!" remarked the doctor, imperturbably.

"I had no idea they were so primitive!" exclaimed Ramsay, taking out his glasses.

The doctor grinned. "Ask Miss Gray to tell you about Chicken Sam's belief in the supernatural!" he said maliciously. "Jove! I think Craig is beckoning. I had forgotten that I promised that I would be one of the judges for this baby party.

He departed, and the others discussed the survival of voodoo. Juliet looked at Chicken Sam with a faint acceleration of interest. It was to him that Derry had appeared as the devil, that night when her

note had reached Doctor Clement so miraculously. She wondered if Chicken had seen him lately; if perhaps Derry had made him, too, an ally. She watched the plump, moon-faced negro with curiosity.

Molly was voluble.

"I think it's simply too wonderfully fascinating!" she gushed. "I wish I could see them do some voodoo, or obi, or whatever it is. Oh, don't you suppose Mr. Evarts will let us meet that wonderful darky, and make him do some conjuring for us? Of course, I don't want them to cut up cats or rattlesnakes or things, but —"

Juliet stopped listening to the chatter, to search the crowd of spectators for the Turleys. Dan Turley was not present, apparently, but in a moment Juliet saw Kitty sitting apart from the other country people, in a crouched and brooding attitude. She was, in fact, not far from the Evartston party.

Her dark eyes glittered in her pale face, and she still looked wild and haggard and tragically wasted — just as ill and terrible as when Juliet had last seen her that October afternoon on Liberty Ridge. But this time she held her head with something of her old-time jauntiness, and was, for her, carefully dressed.

Kitty, it was evident, was out for battle and for conquest to-day. She wore a gaudy but insolently becoming crimson gown; a rough cloak hung from her shoulders, and blew open in the breeze; but she did not seem to feel the cold. A little brown cap was set on her black curls, and her hands and forearms

were incased in riding gauntlets miles too big for her. Her style was all her own, utterly unconventional and startling; but she was the most noticeable woman at the games that day — not excepting stately Juliet, girlish Molly, or flamboyant Louise.

"What an odd-looking girl!" exclaimed the latter, surveying her from afar. Evarts' sister had never until now taken any interest in the mountain people, and had never before seen the beauty of Liberty Ridge. She could not help noticing to her surprise that this unknown young woman was regarding the Evartston party with a fixed and not altogether respectful gaze.

"She's extraordinarily good-looking," exclaimed Miss Alicia.

"Does any one know who she is?" asked Ramsay, stealthily adjusting his eyeglasses again.

"Her name is Turley," said Juliet, briefly.

Kitty and she were looking at each other with the genuine interest which women always take in other women whom they detest.

Louise jumped in her seat as she heard the name.

"So that is Kitty Turley!" she muttered half aloud.

"Who is talking about Kitty Turley?" said Evarts, joining them.

He looked ruddy and happy, and clearly enjoyed his games as much as any of the contestants.

Promptly besieged by questions concerning the girl, he gave a sketchy and semihumorous outline of her heart-shaking career, and of the picturesque

villainies of her father as he knew them. Louise in particular listened attentively, for she felt, now that she had seen her, that Kitty Turley would be a most valuable ally. For the moment she did not quite see how she was going to make her acquaintance.

Kitty herself solved this difficulty for her, however, by rising abruptly, and making her way with her graceful, catlike step to the Evartston people. She had never looked more beautiful, in spite of her pallor, than she did as she stood before them, with her marvelous eyes straying from one to the other, and a delicately contemptuous smile upon her perfect lips.

"I reckon," she said at once, with her usual audacious avoidance of formalities, "you-all were talking about me!"

CHAPTER XXII

LOUISE AND KITTY

"We have pride, envy, rivalship, and a thousand motives to depreciate each other."

SHERIDAN.

EVARTS bowed to her with a flourish.

"Allow me!" he exclaimed with a mockery which was yet not utterly discourteous. "Miss Turley — my friends and family! Their names would take too long, but they all want to meet you. Miss Gray I think you know."

Kitty nodded to Juliet in the casual but perfectly civil manner of an equal.

"Oh, yes," she said, with an indescribable note of sweet irony in her voice — and what a mellow voice it was! "Miss Gray and I know each other right well. I came over here to talk to you people about Nat."

"Ah!" said Evarts, cheerfully. "Our friend of last night! Yes?"

Tommy Norton surprised them all by remarking at this point:—

"I beg pardon, but do you — do you — really *like* to talk about him, you know?"

Kitty ignored the question, and also the subdued

giggle with which Molly had greeted it, and looked directly at Louise.

"Somebody helped him to get away," she went on bluntly. And Louise gasped at her nonchalance. "I want to say I'm grateful."

"My dear girl!" said Evarts, smiling, but slightly annoyed. "None of *us* helped him to get away, believe me!"

"No?" said Kitty, without expression.

"*No!* A stupid manservant let him slip out, that's all, and —"

"Then I'm grateful to *him!*" declared Miss Turley, unperturbed. "I don't reckon it makes such a mighty lot of difference who did it. Are you going to hunt Nat down, now it's all over and done with?" she added, turning in sudden demand upon Evarts.

"Well, really!" he responded with a vexed laugh. "Considering that he might have killed me —"

"Ah, but he didn't," interrupted Kitty, with the assured air of one advancing a cogent argument. Suddenly she smiled, with an illuminating, warm intimacy. "I don't reckon you'll prosecute him. I told him last night you wouldn't."

Evarts was not quick-witted, and the girl's effrontery abashed him. He stared at her with a dropped jaw.

"You see," Kitty went on, with that offhand confidence of one who trusts to her hearer's intelligence and broadmindedness, "you see, Nat wasn't himself last night. He'd been drinking a good deal more than

was good for him, and he hasn't a strong head. You see, any one might make the same mistake when he's tipsy."

"You call attempted murder a mistake?" cut in Ramsay, amused.

"Sure!" flashed Kitty. "If it had been successful murder," — she glanced at Evarts and twinkled, — "it wouldn't have been a mistake."

They had to laugh at that; but Evarts said grimly: —

"He'd have found it was a mistake, all right!"

Four or five men were "putting shot" at the moment — the shot being represented by round, heavy bowlders. A murmur of approval from the other spectators reminded the Evartston group that they were missing the business of the day. All but Louise and Kitty began to watch and comment. Craig's sister abhorred trials of strength, because to her it always seemed rude to her dear, narrow-chested Tommy.

She turned from the field, to find "the Turley girl" at her elbow.

"You are Miss Evarts, aren't you — Miss Louise Evarts?" Kitty spoke quickly and softly.

Louise nodded without speaking.

"You wanted to talk to me," said the mountain girl, hardly moving her lips as she spoke. "Nat told me."

The blood rushed to Louise's face. Her plotting went smoothly — almost too smoothly! It frightened her. She was a little person, in nature as in form, and her daring was small. This strange and rather beautiful girl looked as though she would stop at nothing,

and the relentlessness which she sensed in her filled the weaker woman with terror. She felt as though she had started a juggernaut rolling, and she shivered.

"You can see this better from the other side," said Kitty, in a loud, clear tone. "Do any of you want to come over?"

No one volunteered. Louise hesitated for just a breath; then she said, trembling at her own daring: "I'll come over with you, and see how it looks. Don't bother to come, any one. I'll let you know if I think the view is better from there."

The two girls walked off slowly together.

"It's this way," said Kitty Turley, speaking with that startling frankness which seemed at times so oddly inconsistent with her appealing and seductive beauty. "If you want to break off the marriage between the Gray girl and your brother, I'll not help you." She spoke as though she were a sovereign withholding or conferring favor. "But — if you just want to do her a bad turn on the side — why ma'am, *I'm with you!*" said Kitty; and there was a green light in her eyes, such as one sees in those of a hunting cat.

"But," protested Louise, with much nervous faltering over this, her first essay in intrigue, "why — why do you stipulate? I mean —"

"Why have I scruples about breaking up the match? Why, ma'am, it suits me to have the lady disposed of — married, or," finished Kitty, with calm brutality, "dead!"

Louise shuddered, but her curiosity carried her past the shock.

"Then" — she lowered her voice to the required conspiratorial cadence, and her heart throbbed — "then — you hate her?"

Louise was painfully and wonderfully enjoying herself.

"You might call it that," said Kitty Turley, without apparent emotion. "It's just this way — to see her suffer, I'd willingly be tortured to death myself."

"Horrible!" Louise shrank a little. But Kitty looked quite unconcerned. It was as though she had grown accustomed to think thus, as though the black thought had been so long her night-and-day companion that she had ceased to take count of the hideousness of its features. "She must have wronged you!" exclaimed Louise, in an awed undertone. She found such hate as Kitty's frightful, but subtly fascinating. "She must have done you some dreadful, dreadful wrong!"

Kitty stared straight in front of her at the brown and golden hillside, that loomed across the valley, veiled in mists of gray and purple. The colors, changed softly by the shadows of the clouds, brought no flash of appreciation to the deep, unseeing eyes; the voices of the crowd of spectators, loudly and excitedly commenting on some fresh chapter of the games, did not seem to touch her ears.

"She robbed me of something," said Kitty, and that was all.

Louise started, for she was a literal soul, with not a very flexible understanding of figures of speech.

"I didn't think she was as bad as that," she murmured.

"I suppose you think it was a ring or a pocketbook she stole," said the other, glancing at her. "It wasn't. It was only — my hope!"

"Oh!" Louise's intonation elaborated the monosyllable into something resembling "Was that all?" Kitty laughed bitterly, as she answered the unspoken words.

"Yes," she said. "That was all. But she'll have to pay for it. Oh, believe me — she'll have to pay for it in full!"

Louise, however, was not without a certain crude intuition of her own. It was a lumbering, untrained gift, but it sometimes carried her, porpoiselike, into the middle of delicate situations. She reasoned now that in matters of lost hope and feminine revenge, there must somewhere be a man involved! And the deduction fired her imagination. Juliet Gray, the cold and unapproachable, involved with a mysterious masculine entity!

She plunged into the matter without delay, and leaned close to Kitty's ear.

"Who is he?" she muttered with sparkling eyes.

Kitty started, and looked at her. Before she could answer, a low, audible stir of surprise passing over the little crowd like a brisk breeze, made her glance around mechanically. Some incident un-

rehearsed and unprepared for was taking place evidently.

Next on the program was the competition in horsemanship. In this Evarts himself had arranged to compete. It was a popular move, and pleased the mountain people with its flavor of democracy. He was justly proud of his skill with a horse, and Regis was the wisest beast in three counties. The mountaineers who were also entered were proud of the honor of contesting with Mr. Evarts, who, by virtue of his wealth, and the number of men so constantly in his employ, was a sort of local squire. Of course, every one knew that it was for him the veriest game, indeed. If one of the countrymen won, he got seventy-five dollars in gold; if Evarts was the victor, he turned over the money to the township for the general improvement fund.

Louise saw her brother standing at the far end of the field, examining Regis' bit and girth. The other riders who were to contest for the prize were seeing to their own horses. No man looked smarter than Craig Evarts in his riding togs; best of all, he could ride, and knew it. The knowledge made him gay and high-spirited, and his sister thought, with an unusual rush of affection, that he was a brother to be proud of. She turned impulsively to Kitty, but Kitty was looking neither at Evarts nor at his companions.

Her eyes were fixed upon a distant horseman slowly riding from the woods toward the plateau. The way that he came was steeply inclined, and his horse,

a very big and awkward one, was forced to pick its way with care. The figure in the saddle was an erect and well-set-up one; clearly a man used to a horse. A few of the near-by spectators had already noticed the approach of the newcomer, and Louise could hear passing comments: "Wonder who the new feller is?" "Did you-all know there was any more entries?" "No, and I don't b'lieve Mr. Evarts knowed it, neither!"

Evarts and his companions had not yet noticed the horseman. Indeed, the only person who appeared to be watching his approach with close attention was Kitty Turley. She, with wide eyes and parted lips, was gazing, gazing, as though she feared, hoped, believed, and still was incredulous. Whatever the emotion which the appearance of the stranger aroused in her, it was, at all events, a profound one. She strained her eyes, frowning a little, and stretching herself on tiptoe to see the better. Suddenly she drew a long, sobbing breath, and her heavy lids drooped over the dark splendor of her eyes.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Louise, sensing fresh excitement.

Kitty started as if she had forgotten her existence. "Matter? Nothing, except — the sun has risen!"

She looked at Louise, smiling strangely and brilliantly.

"You didn't answer the question I asked you a moment ago," said Louise, feeling bewildered, and consequently annoyed.

"I asked you — who he was?"

"Some one," said Kitty, exultantly, "that will beat them all!"

Louise was really angry this time. "I don't mean this man on horseback," she explained impatiently. "I mean — the man for whose sake you — I mean, the man you think she —" she floundered.

"I reckon," said Kitty, "you'd better go back to your friends. I see them waving to you."

Louise tossed her head, and turned to go. "Just the same," she said, "I think you might have answered my question."

"I hate," said Kitty, "to answer questions more than once."

When Louise got back to the group of her friends, she found them much excited over the mysterious man on horseback.

"Jove!" exclaimed Ramsay, as the mounted figure came nearer, and pulled up fifty yards back of Evarts and the other men. "He means to make a theatrical effect, whoever he is!"

The stranger sat his big mount like a gray stone statue; he was in gray from head to foot, and the horse, huge and rawboned, was gray, too. Sitting there in the sun with uplifted head, they could see now that he wore a black mask.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MASKED MAN

"Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. . . .
How cam'st thou hither, tell me? and wherefor?
The orchard walls are high, and hard to climb;
And the place death, considering who thou art."

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE men entered against Evarts were Lawson, Dix, and Connoly, all owners of good though rough horses. Connoly was a valley man, Dix and Lawson mountain farmers — if one may be permitted so to abuse the title — of that curious hybrid type near the West Virginia borders. They were neither gentlemen nor yokels, neither crooks nor civic lights, neither paupers nor well-to-do personages. They went in for hunting and trapping in the winter, grain growing and timber selling in the summer, and gaming and horseflesh traffic at all times. A very little sufficed for their actual livelihood, and they lived on from hand to mouth, going off to Lexington or Charlottesville for occasional sprees, or even more occasional business trips, but the rest of the time spending lagging, comfortable days in their hill houses. Unmoral, lazy, shrewd, and cheerful, they represented a singular class, peculiar to the wilder regions of the Middle South. It seemed to

those who studied them, that they and their kind formed the connecting link between civilization and outlawry.

"They're a good-looking lot of fellows," commented Ramsay, who had added a field glass to his pince-nez.

"The new chap's the best of the bunch," Charlie Moss said with the positiveness of the crack athlete.

"Do you suppose then that the new man wants to compete?" said Ramsay.

"Looks like it. What's next, anyway?"

"Trick riding, they call it," said Moss.

"Trick riding!" repeated Molly Davidge, eagerly. "I was sure it was next, and I'm so glad! I planned one part of it my own self. You'll see! And Mr. Evarts is in this, too! Oh, isn't he *wonderful* to look at in his riding clothes? Isn't he, Miss Gray?"

Juliet sat still, suddenly brilliant-cheeked, looking nowhere in particular. Her eyes were not directed at Craig Evarts; she had, on the contrary, forgotten that he lived. She had just been looking through Mr. Ramsay's field glass, and not at her fiancé.

"What are they moving the people away from the end for?" said Ramsay.

"You'll see!" exclaimed Molly once more, nodding mysteriously. She was in high feather, but her bright eyes, dancing now and again to the well-knit figure of Evarts, grew sometimes vaguely and unconsciously wistful.

At each end of the field, the angle of the hillside from

which each plateau originally had been cut was filled in by a flight of white concrete steps, leading on the one end to an encroaching curve of the Evartston driveway, and on the other to the kitchen gardens.

Each flight of steps numbered about a dozen, and though they were very broad and easily ascended by the pedestrian, they were rather steeper than terrace stairs are wont to be, for the mountain side was set to a sharp degree, and the grading had been unusually extensive.

The men began leading their horses up the grassy bank that rose, sloping precipitously, alongside the steps from the field to the gardens. At the same time, at the other end of the grounds, Doctor Clement and two other local men, serving as judges, were placing a little round table at the edge of the drive, with something small and dark upon it.

It soon became clear that the "trick riding" fundamentally was to be a test of the sure-footedness of the men's horses. The contestants were obliged to start from the kitchen gardens, ride down the twelve concrete steps, traverse the length of the plateau as speedily as might be, and then ride up the other flight to where, upon the table in the driveway, a pocketbook with the seventy-five dollars in prize money awaited the first and therefore the fastest and surest arrival.

If a beast fell, or a rider was unhorsed, the one or the other was disqualified. It was, in fact, as pretty and keen a little contest in its way as could be devised,

or so the Evartston people thought it, and they applauded enthusiastically as soon as they had grasped the idea of it.

"Is'nt it all just wonderful?" cried Molly, in shrill delight. "And I thought of having the money all ready in a purse! Don't you all think that makes it ever so much nicer? But who do you suppose the wonderful, strange one is?"

Ramsay was peering through the glass.

"He's all right himself, but I don't think much of his mount for this business," he remarked disparagingly. "Want to look, Miss Davidge?"

Molly took the field glasses, and nearly fainted with admiration when she had looked once through them.

"I never," she declared with something approaching solemnity, "saw such a wonderful figure — never in all my days!"

Juliet, in the strange mood that was so plentifully mingled with self-chastisement, could have flayed her own living heart for its mad leap of pride. Certainly Derry was a splendid creature, and there is no more human and pardonable emotion in women than their exultation in the brute strength and physical perfection in the male beings belonging to them. Her Man sat his horse as though he could boast the blood of centaurs. She had never seen him in the saddle before, and she knew that until now she had never fully appreciated the bodily magnificence of him.

And though she was ashamed of herself, she found herself responding to the theatrical element in his ap-

pearance among them that day. It was so boyish of him! No, let her be honest; it was so childish! Nothing could be more childishly silly than this bravado of claptrap effect; yet how she warmed to him — how she loved him for it!

There were, meanwhile, exclamations from the men waiting with their mounts on the starting line.

"By jiminy crack!" ejaculated Lawson, with his mild eyes stretched to their uttermost. "There ain't two men in old Virginny kin set a hawse lak that!"

"He looked jus' so," said Dix, with reminiscent relish, "the day he steeplechased that li'l' purse away from me over to St. Peter's."

St. Peter's Rest was a sort of public sporting lodge twenty miles away in the game region, so called in the first place because Peter was "the greatest fighter of them all" — ergo, a good sport. The "Rest," named for him, was the scene of many quiet little prize fights, as well as the headquarters for huntsmen in the open shooting season. With the men of that neighborhood — and the neighborhood covered forty miles — St. Peter's took the place of country club, hunting lodge, and race meet. Many were the horse deals made there, and it was reported that the gambling on winter nights settled the hash of many rash gamesters who had stopped in there for a "drink of red liquor."

"He used to be a whole lot at St. Peter's," said Connoly, looking curiously at the masked newcomer.

Evarts, too, was staring at him with a puzzled look,

as though he were trying to recall where he had seen him.

"Any of you know him, boys?" he said, dropping his tone discreetly.

Instantly the men became enigmatic. In their precarious lives they had learned, among a good deal of indifferent information and achievements, to be non-committal. 'Most every man, they argued, might like to go in the shade once in a way. 'Twasn't any chap's business to throw the light on him without permission.

"I *thought* I knew him," said Dix, evasively, "but I reckon he jus' reminded me of some one I'd seen."

"You cyan' tell much from a man's seat," said Connoly; "'specially," he added, with pardonable boasting, "in Virginny!"

"*Ah* never see him befo'," said Lawson, unblushingly. And Evarts knew better than to press the matter.

Instead, he turned toward the stranger, who still sat motionless on the rawboned gray, outlined statue-like against the russet woods, and hailed him with a clear shout.

"Hello!" he called.

The other raised his crop to the brim of his slouch hat, without a word.

"Is your business with any of us?" asked Evarts.

"With all of you, sir!" said the masked man, in a ringing tone. In the crisp, still air the two men's voices sounded sharp and clear, and their words were audible to all who listened.

"Do you want to enter the games, my friend?" asked Evarts, in the polite but slightly condescending tone that went with his impeccable riding breeches.

"If I am not too late."

"Not at all! This is just a friendly little affair, and we are very offhand in our procedure. Bring up your mount, sir."

"Any formalities?" The stranger walked his horse slowly toward them.

"None except name and place of residence. And your horse's name, if you like."

"Hasn't any," said the masked man. "He's a mutt. I never rode him before, and I don't think much of him."

"But, man," exclaimed Evarts, in surprise, "you'll break your neck with a strange horse in a contest like this. It's a test of sure-footedness, and —"

"I reckon I'll see it through," said the stranger, indifferently.

Evarts shrugged his shoulders. If the man wanted to get a fall and lame his horse, it was his own affair. He was conscious of an unaccountable irritation. He felt in his bones that the masked man and himself were natural enemies; he hated having him around.

The three Virginians exchanged glances, but did not join in the conversation.

"Name, please?" said Evarts, shortly.

"Montague," said the other, as briefly. He spoke very clearly.

Juliet could hear it from where she sat, and she

caught her breath with a little sobbing laugh. He had remembered, then! He had remembered, and it was with quaint intention that he had taken with his mask the name of that glorious lover of Verona! The memory of that hour in the Under Trail, when they had talked of Juliet and her love, flooded her heart with a warmth that reached her face.

Molly Davidge nudged Louise who had slipped silently into her place, and had not spoken since rejoining them.

"Did you ever see such a change in a girl?" Molly whispered. "Does she always light up like that when a good-looking new man comes on the scene?"

Louise said nothing, but she glanced at Juliet and sneered openly. She was beginning to have inklings regarding Kitty Turley's final cryptic utterance.

"Hush, you girls!" exclaimed Charlie Moss. "I want to hear the mysterious brigand talk to Evarts."

"Oh, he *does* look almost as wonderful as a brigand!" murmured Molly.

Miss Alicia snorted.

"He doesn't carry himself like a brigand," she remarked, "nor yet talk like one. I'm convinced he's a delightful person."

Juliet smiled at the dear, incurably romantic soul.

"What was that he just said?" said Ramsay. "I heard Craig ask him the place he came from, but missed the answer."

"He said 'Liberty,'" returned Moss. "Where's that?"

"Liberty — Liberty," said Miss Alicia, reflectively. "Now, where have I heard of a town called that?"

"There's a Liberty in Georgia, I think," said Ramsay reflectively.

Juliet pressed her handkerchief to her lips to hide their quivering. "Montague — from Liberty!" She could not tell why a sudden rush of tenderness shook her, filling her eyes unaccountably with hot tears. It was like a hand stretched out across a great, lonely distance to touch hers. He meant it for a message — he must have meant it so! And, for a moment, though she did not hope ever to speak with him face to face again, nor ever to look into his eyes this side of the grave, she was very close to being happy. Such strange and tiny things make for the soul's joy in this mad world where we live!

Evarts was explaining the rules and conditions of the contest. Fragments of the explanations drifted to them, though he was not talking loud: "If your horse falls, you know, you're disqualified. And if you're thrown, you are. It's a sort of trick race, you see."

"How clear the air is!" Juliet found herself saying. "You can hear everything!" She was looking straight in front of her, with hands clasped tightly on her knee. She wanted the contest to begin, and yet she dreaded it. "How clear the air is!" she repeated vaguely. "It's like — a bell."

"No, it's like an acousticon," said Molly Davidge; "you know the thing they have in theaters to make you hear — Oh, heavens! I believe they're off!"

CHAPTER XXIV

"MONTAGUE FROM LIBERTY"

"But I go out with all upon me shining,
With liberty and freedom for my plume, . . .
And decked with daring deeds instead of ribbons,
Twirling my wit as it were my moustache,
The while I pass among the crowd, I make
Bold truths ring out like spurs!"

ROSTAND.

FIVE participants started down the first flight of concrete steps, Lawson on a rough sorrel mare inured to mountain climbing, Dix on a little black beast that had once been a polo pony, Connoly on a hard-mouthed young chestnut brute that he had broken himself and believed in doggedly, Evarts on Regis, the one beautiful animal of the lot, and the masked stranger Montague on his rawboned gray "mutt" without a name.

"I'm putting my money on the dark horse — I mean the gray," said Ramsay.

"How disloyal!" cried Molly. "I'll bet anybody a pair of gloves that Mr. Evarts will win."

"Take you!" said Kitty Turley, from ten feet away.

She had approached quietly, and lingered, partly perhaps because the view of the field was less obstructed than among the country people on the other side, and partly, too, because she wished to watch Juliet. She

looked defiantly from one to the other of them, and her eyes were black jewels in her white face. "Take you!" she said again, with a thrill in her voice.

And then Juliet Gray did something which amazed and appalled herself no less than every one else.

"Take you!" she echoed, in a tone that was quite new to all who heard her. She was sitting up very straight, and there was a spot of violent pink in each cheek. They all looked at her in dumbfounded astonishment.

"Why, Juliet!" exclaimed Miss Evarts, really shocked. "You must be joking! Of course you would not wager against Craig, my dear!"

"Miss Gray merely likes the fun of a chance!" said Ramsay, coming good-humoredly to the rescue. "You others don't understand the true gambling spirit."

The pink deepened in Juliet's face, but she said nothing. Louise looked at her scornfully.

"Oh, look!" gasped Molly, half rising from her seat.

"All bets are off!" exclaimed Moss. "All on Evarts, anyway — he's disqualified!"

"No, he isn't!" cried Molly, exultantly excited.

Regis had stumbled almost on the brink of the steps, plunged wildly, threatening to topple over headforemost, and then, almost by a miracle, it seemed, recovered himself. Evarts backed him a few steps from the flight, and quieted him a second before starting again. Meanwhile the other four horses had almost completed the descent.

Suddenly Dix on his polo pony went down with a

crash. There was a shout, two grooms ran out, and man and horse both limping a bit, but not seriously injured, retired from the field.

Connoly's big brute, used to cross-country work, went halfway down the flight of steps, stumbling dangerously, until the fall of the other pony frightened him, when, with no warning, he jumped the rest of the distance to the turf. He landed on his knees, poor beast, and Connoly went over his head.

"Too bad!" exclaimed Ramsay, who was standing up. "It was a good try, and I bet he's marked himself. Anybody want the glass?"

"Fine hunting horse that!" commented Moss, adjusting the glass. "The man's in a whooping rage."

"And are both of them out of it, now?" asked Molly, eagerly.

At the same moment there was a louder shout than before. The masked man on the rawboned outside had safely made the descent, but just at the bottom step, as the rider was urging his mount forward, the brute stumbled awkwardly and — went down! Lawson had already gotten away, and was cantering smoothly and swiftly toward the second concrete flight. Evarts, on Regis, was picking his way a trifle too hastily down the steps.

And then an odd thing happened.

Just as the stranger's horse fell, Regis, landing at the bottom of the steps, stopped short, and reared straight up. Evarts was sitting carelessly, and the abrupt motion, coming on top of that swift descent,

unseated him. He lost his balance, and, struggling to regain it, was thrown. It was a humiliating experience, but one that comes occasionally even to good horsemen. The thing happened at precisely the same moment that saw Montague extricating himself from the fallen and thrashing horse.

Juliet noted that even in that second of excitement he remembered to straighten his mask.

The rawboned nag stumbled to his feet unhurt, but was of course disqualified, along with Evarts and his Regis. Like a flash, the stranger had sprung to Regis' side, and with what looked like one quick lithe movement had his leg across him. Evarts, who was picking himself up swearing, with a sprained shoulder, heard the other shout: —

"This is not the first time this beast and I have made a running together!"

Then, like an arrow, Regis sped across the plateau after Lawson's mare.

"What on earth is the fool talking about?" groaned Evarts, gripping his aching shoulder with his sound hand. "What was it he said? 'Not the first time.' By gad!" His jaw dropped, and momentarily he forgot the pain. "By gad!" he repeated. "I believe it was he who stole Regis on the mountain that night! Curse this shoulder! I can't think while it's giving me fits like this! Get me a drink, some one!"

"By the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Ramsay, craning his neck. "The fellow can ride!"

"But isn't he disqualified?" demanded Molly, bewildered. "His own horse —"

"Rather! He's just doing this for fun — to give us a treat! But it's jolly pretty!" said Moss.

"Look! He's caught up with that other man!" cried Louise, who found herself contagiously excited by this time. "I believe he's going to pass him!"

Neck and neck the two horses took the last stretch of the field, and neck and neck they came to the determining upward flight. Lawson's mare balked at it outright, and Lawson rode her away, and brought her up to it a second time. To the spectators' delight, the masked man waited courteously for Lawson's second try. When it became evident that the sorrel mare would have none of the steps, the stranger saluted Lawson with his crop, and, leaning over Regis' neck, began to coax him forward step by step.

"He'll do it, I bet!" exclaimed Ross.

There was a buzz of applause, as the beautiful animal and his striking rider began slowly to mount the steep steps. Then the applause died to a breathless and attentive stillness. The excitement of the little audience was out of all proportion to the importance of the occasion. People were keenly, absurdly interested. In what was almost a dead silence Regis and his mysterious rider mounted the white steps in the sun.

"Only one step more!" muttered Ramsay, under his breath.

A minute more —

"He's done it!" exclaimed Moss, sharply.

"Oh, poor, dear Mr. Evarts!" mourned Molly Davidge, ready to cry.

Kitty laughed out hysterically and proudly. Juliet, for her part, said never a word. But suddenly she and Kitty turned and looked straight at one another. And through all their mutual dislike and mutual distrust, they saw clearly that, in that one isolated moment, they were in sympathy — and it was a sympathy that went deeper than mere personal enmities, or such things of the surface.

Montague, patting and praising Regis, rode to the table, where the judges were standing. He stooped swiftly from the saddle, picked up the purse, uncovered, and waved his hat to them in grandiloquent greeting, and turned once more so sharply that the horse's forefeet seemed to paw the air as he wheeled.

The buzz of excitement deepened to a low rumble, as Regis was brought to the top of the concrete flight a second time.

"Glory! The fellow's going back the same way!"

"Going to give Evarts his money's worth!" chuckled Charlie Moss.

"Why, I believe he likes it!" exclaimed Miss Alicia, getting hold of the field glasses.

One of the judges ran after the rider with a shout of explanation, but he paid no heed. Riding more easily and speedily now, as though he and the horse were in completer sympathy and confidence, he made

the second descent in a gallant manner that brought a fresh and hearty burst of applause.

"Did he *have* to do that?" asked Miss Chiswick, of Norfolk, who took not the slightest interest in any of it.

"Not he!" said Ramsay.

"I told you he was just doing it for a lark!" added Moss, watching with the critical enthusiasm of the sportsman.

The stranger in the mask reached the bottom of the flight without mishap, and there paused and gravely confronted Lawson, whose mare had finally refused the steps for the third time.

Lawson, as though fascinated, had pulled up to watch the performance of the unknown.

"Won't she take it?" demanded Montague.

Lawson shook his head.

"No, confound the little devil!" he returned, without resentment.

"Sure?"

"Not a chance!"

"Too bad, Dick," said the stranger, under his breath.

"That's all right, Derry!" rejoined Lawson, in the same tone. "Say, you-all haven't forgot how to ride have you?"

He grinned. The masked man saluted him again with much ceremony and gravity, and galloped down the field to where his own horse was standing with a groom at his head.

In a second he had changed horses, and, settling himself in the saddle, turned to Evarts, who was standing staring at him.

"Catch!" he cried. "This was won by your horse, sir!"

He flung the pocketbook to the other man, with a gay laugh.

"And here's something else for you," he added, still laughing. "If Ted Kipley, the sheriff from Carkham, happens to be here, he may like it as a souvenir."

He threw his mask on to the turf with a quick, bold gesture, and sat there laughing around at them, his eyes alight under the slanting brows, a flush upon his dark cheek. Then he raised his slouch hat — was it Juliet's fancy that he looked straight toward her as he did it? — and wheeled his mount. At a flat gallop he took the turf bank, up and on — up and on — into the woods whence he had come.

A murmur was running through the groups of mountain people. "Derry! Did you see him? 'Twas Derry Blake, as sure as you're standin' there! My, he's a nerve!"

At the judges' table they were still open-mouthed. Doctor Clement slapped his hand on his leg with a round oath.

"And I might have known," he muttered, "that there's only one man in the county who has the foolhardiness and the horsemanship for a stunt like that!"

CHAPTER XXV

THREE WOMEN

> "The woman's motive? Shall we daub ourselves
> With finding roots for nettles? 'Tis soft clay
> And easily explored. . . ."
>
> MRS. BROWNING.

KITTY TURLEY came to Evartston next day, and asked boldly for Miss Louise Evarts.

Louise received her in the library, where a bright fire was burning. The young lady of the house had caught a cold while on the grounds the day before, and was sniffly and discontented. Kitty, on the contrary, was looking better and brighter than she had for months. The sight of Derry, the sound of his voice, had been food and drink to her starved nature. Moreover, thus fortified anew, she was now ready for a reopening of battle. In her despair she had grown apathetic, had given up the struggle. Now he was near, he was attainable and there was hope for her. She was ready to fight for him, with any weapons that came to her hand. Indeed, Kitty was herself again, and there was something of the old glow on her smooth cheek, something of the old sensuous fire in her beautiful eyes. She was crazily dressed in a dingy black woolen gown and a frayed scarf, but she was as lovely as a dream.

"How do you do?" said Louise, rubbing her chafed nose with her handkerchief, and pulling a yellow velvet burnous closer about her chilly little shoulders.

"Nice place, this," said Miss Turley, carelessly, glancing about. "I shouldn't care to live in it myself, though. You sent for me?"

Hawkins had been dismissed for having supposedly let Nat Mooney escape, but he remained in Louise's employ, while filling the post of groom in the hotel livery stables. At early dawn he had gone to the Ridge with a note for Kitty Turley.

"Oh, I'm so bothered!" said Louise, pettishly. "I know you said you wouldn't help me, but — but I keep hoping that you will, you know!"

She poked the fire violently.

"I wish you'd talk out," said Kitty, bluntly. Louise had motioned her to a chair, but she remained standing. "What is it you want me to do?"

Louise hesitated, and caught her breath. Then she forged ahead, gathering a desperate courage from the sound of her own voice. Secretly she was just a little proud, too — proud of her instinct for intrigue, proud of the plan which she had evolved for the ousting of Juliet.

"On Wednesday — next Wednesday night," she whispered breathlessly, "we are all going to some sort of ghost thing — voodoo, obi — I don't know just what, but it's magic and that sort of thing — in a cottage on the mountain; the cottage of the negro they call Chicken Sam. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes," said Kitty, who had been listening with frowning attention. "I know every one on the Ridge. Chicken's down on dad, first because dad backed out of some dog deal they were in together, and next because dad wouldn't let him have applejack he couldn't pay for. But I know him — oh, yes. Well?"

"Then you — you haven't any influence with him?" said Louise, disappointedly.

"I can make any living darky do anything I like. Go on."

"Well," proceeded Louise, after a hurried glance around her, "I've heard that they have some sort of signs — or — or omens, at those voodoo affairs. People get warnings, don't they? Something like fortune telling, I suppose, only spookier. I'm not very clear about it, you see."

"H'm!" commented Kitty.

"Only — only —" Louise began to falter a little. "I thought — maybe — they could scare — Juliet — out of marrying Craig!" The plot was out now, and she went scurrying on with a rush: "Tell her, I mean, that she would have bad luck, or die, or something, if she did! Something like that, you know."

The project sounded inept and childish, even to its originator herself, now that it had been put into plain, illuminating words. Strange how even the meanest words have a way of tearing the veils from our own self-conceits and subterfuges, and show them to be

what they are — lame, shoddy things, too weak for the light of day!

"Lord!" said Kitty Turley, staring at her. "How old are you, anyhow?"

Louise flushed duskily, but said nothing. She was rather pitifully ashamed of the fact that she was really much younger than she looked.

However, Kitty expected no answer. "Look here," she went on with sincere curiosity, "would that really scare *you* off? A few criss-crosses, and a little blue fire, and some nonsense said backward, and all that sort of thing? Would it stop *you* from doing something you wanted to?"

"Oh, yes!" said Louise, earnestly, and shuddered. For, like all small-natured romanticists, she was immensely superstitious.

There are those whose craving for sensation reaches into their highest spiritual being. If they are idealists, they try to believe themselves clairvoyant; if realists, they take up mesmerism; if they are intellectual, they become students of esoteric philosophy and metaphysics; if ignorant, they hold by fortune telling and dream books. Somewhere in this latter class belonged Louise Evarts; and though Kitty had a wild streak of mysticism in herself, she had never had any sympathy or understanding for the more primitive and grotesque side of the quality, such as she discerned in Louise.

"I don't reckon Miss Gray would be as easy as you," said the mountain girl, with a short laugh. "She's

got nerve, and she's got brains. I've not much brains, but I've plenty of nerve. I don't reckon, now" — and Kitty surveyed her with an impersonal scrutiny — "I don't reckon you've either nerve or brains! But she'd see through a fake, and even if she didn't understand, she wouldn't care two cents. Besides, ma'am, I've already told you that I'm strong for that marriage myself. Why should I —*I!* — want to break it up, I'd like to know?"

"I — I'd try to do something for you —" began Louise, finding unexpected difficulty in making the bribe for which she had planned so confidently.

Kitty burst out laughing.

"Lord!" she drawled, with more Southern accent than usual. "That *is* funny! Why, ma'am, dad's got an awful lot of money salted away! I'm going to be an heiress one of these days, I reckon. I don't really need the pay, thanks!"

Louise was uncomfortable, and so as a result she was cross and sullen.

"Of course," she said, vexed, but nearly crying, "you needn't help if you don't choose! Only — only — I'd do anything — anything to keep her from marrying Craig!"

"And why?"

Before Kitty's searching brown eyes Louise broke down, and poured out her pitiful little romance with Tommy Norton, telling of her dread of losing her brother's fortune, her designs to keep it for herself and Tommy until Aunt Alicia died; everything, good

and bad, she told. And Kitty listened to her as she would have listened to the howl and clamor of a strange beast. The girl of the mountains was at least large in her point of view and strong in her emotions. This bundle of pettiness, avarice, stupidity, and weakness disgusted her.

"Poor baby!" she remarked, not sympathetically, but contemptuously. "So there's a man in your business, too!"

If there was a note of comradeship in this, it was quite unintentional, but Louise thought she caught one, and followed it up eagerly.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "You are so strong and so quick! You can do whatever you like, and get what you like! You might — yes, I do think you might help me!"

"Get what I like, can I?" said Kitty, in a curious tone. "Do what I like, eh? Not in a million years, ma'am! I can't," said Kitty, with a line showing around her mouth. "I can't get him back."

"You could! You could if you tried! I know you could!" cried Louise. For, indeed, she was impressed through and through with a sense of Kitty's power.

The other girl shook her head.

"Not while she's above ground," she said with a short laugh.

Then, all at once, the sound of her own words seemed to arrest her. She stood quite still, looking at Louise. Then, in a lower, and quite different voice, she repeated: "Not — while she's above ground!"

Louise shrank instinctively before the cold, strange expression in the great dark eyes. It was impersonal and relentless; it was inhuman, deliberate, and grave. Atropos, who cuts the threads of life, might wear just as uncaring and as dark.

The two girls stood in electric silence for a full minute. Then Kitty, with a deep sigh, roused herself like one who shakes off a spell, or scatters the heavy mists of sleep.

"Wednesday night, in Chicken Sam's cottage on the mountain," she muttered. "Voodoo — obi. It will be just right! Just right!"

"You will help me, after all?" exclaimed Louise, excitedly.

"Yes," said Kitty. Her voice was ominous, her eyes somber, but Louise, though she was vaguely uneasy, had a shallow little intelligence that could only accept one thing at a time, and she merely realized that her queer and rather terrifying ally had changed her mind.

"You will give her a scare?" she cried.

"Yes," said Kitty, gravely. "I will give her a scare."

Suddenly Louise shivered at something which she felt but could not define.

"Oh!" she gasped, growing white. "You won't do anything dreadful, will you? I mean — I mean — I've heard of people being scared to death!"

"She's not the sort," said Kitty, "to be — *scared* — to death."

There was the lightest emphasis on the word. Already Louise was ashamed of her silly misgivings. What nonsense! Of course it was all right! A scare would do Juliet no harm, and what else could there be that Kitty or any one else could do? People didn't do "dreadful things" outside of detective stories.

"Then it's all right?" she said in a relieved and animated way.

"Good-by," said Kitty, shortly, and walked to the door.

"Wednesday evening?" persisted Louise.

"Wednesday evening," said Kitty, quietly.

She left the room.

By the time she had crossed the terrace Kitty Turley had entirely shaken off the outward and visible signs of the strange and fateful mood which had made Louise shiver. Her eyes were brilliant as before; her soft, sweet mouth was gently smiling.

She saw a tall woman crossing the sloping, frost-browned lawn, and waited for her.

Juliet was in a blue gown that matched her eyes. Her hair was drawn back severely from her face. She looked pale and pure, refined by painful thought and hard struggle.

She bowed to Kitty without antagonism, and said: "Good morning."

But the other girl made an angry and disdainful gesture, as though she flung away the greeting, and dispensed with formalities once and for all.

"You and I don't need to talk that way," she said sharply. "It's bedrock between us!"

"You speak as though you were my enemy," said Juliet Gray, looking at her with her clear eyes. "I am not yours."

Kitty laughed.

"You'd better be!" she said.

Juliet shook her head. Her glance strayed to the distant hills, rose and violet in the late autumnal haze.

"It is not worth while," she said gently. "Very few things are worth while, I think. And I do not believe that enmity ever is."

Kitty stared at her, frowning. This fair girl's remoteness enraged her. Juliet seemed suddenly impregnable, not to be touched nor hurt by little things nor little people. Yet she was very human, too, with her tired, hurt look, and the warm cadence of her voice.

"I don't reckon you want to die just yet," said Kitty, casually.

"There are a good many things worse than death," was Juliet's quiet answer.

"Nat came right close to hitting you last night, didn't he?" And Kitty grinned.

"Very close."

"I reckon," the girl spoke in an offhand manner, flicking her shabby little boot with her riding whip, "I reckon you don't believe you're in any danger!"

"I cannot see why I should be," returned Juliet, with a colder accent, and a little proud lift of her head.

"You don't. That's funny!" Kitty appeared to reflect on this. At last she said: "Are you going to marry the Evarts man?"

Juliet drew a long breath. "Yes," she said.

"Certain sure — on the level?"

"Yes."

"I reckon," mused Kitty, "that you are the sort of fool girl that keeps her word if the skies fall. Will you marry him whatever happens?"

"Yes," said Juliet, for the third time.

"Swear it!"

"I swear that I will keep my word to Craig Evarts if it is humanly possible."

"I don't like your way of putting it! Just say you're going to marry him!"

"One of us might die, you know," said Juliet, trying to smile. "Your friend might aim better another time!"

"If you keep out of my way, and never see Derry Blake again," said Kitty, slowly, "Nat won't aim at you at all. I told him to shoot you," she proceeded calmly, "because I knew Derry was around, and I thought you might mix up with things again, and make trouble for me."

The blood rushed to Juliet's face.

"I am not likely to mix myself up in his affairs again," she said coldly. And Kitty knew that it was her hurt woman's pride that spoke. The mountain girl laughed with frank and merciless enjoyment.

"I reckon you felt mighty bad," she taunted, "about his never coming back to see you."

"He was under no greater obligations to come back to see me than any one else," said Juliet, in a level tone. "I think that when he knew he was safe and free, he should have sent some sort of message to both of us, since it was we who helped him to escape. That's all."

Kitty was silent a moment. At last she looked at Juliet with marvelously brilliant eyes.

"You don't intend to see him?" she said.

"No — never!"

"Will you swear that, too?"

"There is no need to swear it. You know that I have no — no wish to see him."

"I reckon," Kitty said, as though making a decision, "I'll give you that one chance. But if you try to go back on what you've just said — look out!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"No — but you will."

All at once the queer, triumphant smile which Juliet remembered played about her lips.

"There's something else," she said. "I might as well tell you now. He never rightly knew that he was — as you say — safe and free."

Juliet stared at her, not comprehending.

"He thought," Kitty went on, "that Nat was dead, and that there was a price upon his head. You see, that Sunday morning, I — didn't give him the

right signal, after all. That's why I kept you shut up, so you wouldn't find out till I got ready."

Juliet felt her heart stop, and she gazed at the other girl blankly, groping wildly for words.

"But — but —" she gasped. "You wore white — a white dress —"

"I took off the skirt of the white dress as soon as I was out of your sight," said Kitty Turley, smiling quietly, "and I wore a scarlet petticoat. The signal that Derry saw was — red!"

CHAPTER XXVI

"THE DARK OF THE MOON"

"Far away in the twilight time
Of every people, in every clime,
Dragons and griffins, and monsters dire,
Born of water, and air, and fire,
Crawl and wriggle and foam with rage,
Through dusk tradition and bygone age. . . ."

J. G. WHITTIER.

IT is a curious fact that human nature delights in being frightened. Just why the emotion of fear is so precious to us, or just why the world is willing to pay so lavishly for the excitement of experiencing it, forms too large and subtle a question for laymen. It carries one immediately into the study of the mind, which is more puzzling and intricate than a tropical forest, and more grotesque than a paddockful of nightmares. But it is nevertheless true that most people like the sensation of terror, not accidentally experienced, to be sure, but when they make or hire it for themselves. The feelings of a man in a runaway automobile cannot be entirely pleasing, yet the adventurer in Coney Island pays good money for quite a similar thrill as he howls with delicious dread upon the scenic railways.

Accepting this unwholesome truth, we need not be

surprised to find the Evartston house party reveling in the prospects of a "voodoo celebration" in Chicken Sam's mountain shanty, and preparing to hie themselves there in the acutest state of pleasurable apprehension. Being highly civilized creatures, they naturally were entranced by the notion of beholding ghostly apparitions, gin-crazed negroes, and sacrificially slain animals; all combined in one festal night.

The entertainment had been arranged for Wednesday evening, it being then the darkest dark of the moon, when witchcraft and devil work go forward most favorably. Chicken, diplomatically approached with a jingling pocketbook, had finally expressed himself as willing to stage manage the affair "fo' de folks f'm de No'th."

He was a little puzzled regarding the thing, being a simple soul who took his magic seriously and not as a show. His cabin had often enough been the scene of "cunjer work," but never yet conjure work to order! Just at first, indeed, Evarts had found him dubious and reluctant. Ten dollars, however, was always ten dollars. And after a bit Chicken Sam confided that a great "cunjer doctoress," a traveling voodoo woman, was expected in the Liberty Ridge region at the dark of the moon, and might be induced — for a further personal consideration — to do some "witcher bizniz" for the edification of the visiting strangers.

Incidentally, Molly and the others were vastly thrilled by a warning from Chicken Sam himself:

"Reckon de No'thern ladies don' min' some noise an' glorification, suh — 'case, niggers dey runs plumb outten dey haids, come cunjer nights!"

It may seem remarkable that Evarts and the other men were ready to take a party of women to a negro gathering in a lonely spot at night, to look on at a form of festivity known to excite the wildest and least civilized drops of the black blood. But it must be remembered that they all, with the exception of Juliet, were unimaginative; that is to say, that while voluntarily in search of sensation they were actually skeptical. They could not grasp the fact that in the twentieth century there could be any danger from things which they recognized as medieval. They refused, in short, to take the matter seriously; they were so made, indeed, that they could not! It was to them a game, a show; and though they thought the women rather silly to want so eagerly to go, they themselves looked forward to a diverting and unusual evening.

It may here be mentioned at the risk of anticipating, that they got it.

The one person who was really disapproving, and who openly advised against the expedition, was Doctor Clement.

"I know these hill darkies," he said earnestly. "They aren't civilized, Craig — believe me!"

"Nonsense, doctor!" laughed the young man. "They've got the franchise; you're behind the times! The girls want to see a 'witcher meetin',' and they

shall. That's all there is to it; there's not the slightest need to be concerned."

"They'll get drunk!" growled the doctor. "And when they are drunk the dear, playful souls will shoot each other up — and you, too, most probably."

But Evarts would only laugh at him, so he abandoned the point, and politely told his young friend to "go to the devil!"

The matter rankled, however, for Doctor Clement was a man who felt responsibilities — other peoples, as well as his own. On Tuesday, so impressed was he that all would not be well with the jaunt, that he rode up to see Mackanerny — whom he liked, and with whom he had had many a pipe and chat, on cozy winter evenings when the Northern sojourners had flitted away, and almost his sole practice lay in the hills.

To Mackanerny, over a toddy and a comfortable wood fire, he unfolded Evarts' project for the following Wednesday night.

The two men, who knew their mountains, discussed the question, frowning and shaking their heads over the cheery self-confidence and general pig-headedness of the younger generation, which would only take count of what it had already seen, and knew naught at all of the chances of the Great Unlikely. There didn't seem much to do about it, however.

"If I'd get Ted Kipley over with the boys, in case of trouble," so Mack justly said, "Mr. Evarts would never forgi'e me, and 'twould mak' bad feelin' among

the black fellers. Na, na, sir! There'll be little trouble, I'm thinkin'; let be, let be!"

"I'd give something, just the same," said Doctor Clement, "to know that at least one dependable man was there with them — a man who knows something about handling men, and who doesn't think it archaic or foolish to carry a gun! How about you, Mack?"

"Mr. Evarts wad never forgi'e me!" the Scotchman said again. And he shook his head, though regretfully, for small and quiet as he was, he dearly loved a scrap. "Ye'd not go yerself, doctor?"

"I've a confinement case in Battlebrook," said the doctor, "and the birth of one human being who may amount to something is more important than the lives of twenty of those horror-loving, morbid, scatter-brained society fools!"

The doctor spoke savagely, for when he was exasperated he was forcible.

Just before he left Mackanerny's shack, however, he had an idea which he appeared to jump at.

"Derry Blake is still hereabouts," he said cautiously.

The foreman flashed him a look.

"Ay!" he said. "But he needn't be reportin' it, for all he is. I saw him on the trail last night, and he stopped and spoke to me as cool as mint — but he says he's not stayin'; just come up for the games at Evartston, says he, as bold as ever! God love the rascal! I dare say it's a woman; 'tis usually so with Derry, ye ken!"

The doctor nodded, with an absent look.

Suddenly he leaned forward confidentially, and began to talk, close to the Scotchman's ear. Mack nodded several times, and when Doctor Clement rode away, he had a different air, as though his anxiety and dissatisfaction had been lightened.

Wednesday night came duly round. It was cold and clear, with no wind when what Doctor Clement called derisively "the Evartston voodoo party" started out.

The women of the party consisted of Juliet, Louise, and Molly Davidge. Miss Chiswick was, as she said, used to darkies, and did not care about visiting them, however thrilling the inducement. And Aunt Alicia wisely decided that her nerves were not equal to the effort and fatigue. Evarts, Moss, Ramsay, and Tommy Norton were the escorts. Tommy would gladly not have gone, but Louise could not trust him not to flirt with Miss Chiswick, so insisted on taking him whether he liked it or not.

"I feel sure," sighed Molly Davidge, ecstatically, "that we are going to have a wonderful time."

"Wrap up warm!" Evarts went about, counseling them. "You've no idea how cold it is higher up in the mountains at this time of year!"

They were all excited and animated — just as though they were going to the theater, Juliet thought. She herself could not rouse her leaden spirits sufficiently to take much interest, except the interest of apprehension. It all seemed to her rather an appalling business, and her nerves, tired out already, shiv-

ered at the whole expedition. How horrid, and how unnecessary, was what she said to herself. She detested the very name of voodoo.

The party went in motors to the end of the good road, and there, with lanterns, made a slow and toilsome ascent of the Ridge. It was very dark in the twisting path, though the sky was full of stars. The way led through dense little forest lands, and under lowering ledges of rock. To the bitter temperature of the November night was added the piercing chill of the mountains. Exercise, luckily, kept them from feeling the cold too severely. Once one of the men, seized with misgivings, and suffering from the weather, suggested turning back, but he was outvoted, and they pressed on and up.

The dark of the moon! There is something supernatural and goblin-like in the very phrase, calculated to whip the fancy and curdle the blood. The dark of the moon — when ghouls steal through graveyards, and the powers of Lucifer are abroad! The dark of the moon — when the witchfolk hold high carnival, and warlocks on wild wind horses race through the night! The dark of the moon — when all that is secret, all that is unearthly, stirs in the stagnant blackness, and crawls viperous beneath the chill witch stars!

The night was full of subtle sounds, magnified by the lack of wind. All the airs of heaven were dumb and hushed, and in the electric, empty atmosphere, the earth seemed to talk, and the gnarled mountain

trees were moving things that groaned, as the human beings passed.

Juliet, worn and overwrought, found the silent journey through the darkness a task of horror. Visions, grotesque and dreadful, loomed to her view through woods that closed upon them again like shutters. Her imagination ran riot, and transformed the call of owls to ghostly laughter, and made the scurrying flight of forest creatures sound like demoniac footfalls in the dead leaves.

They carried lanterns, and the monstrous shadows that were cast, leaping and capering along with them, were like sprites of darkness, dim devil shapes of the abyss, mocking their stumbling ascent with ghostly mimicry.

The way was long and steep and tortuous. It seemed a great while before they sighted a little cabin with a light, and knew that they had reached the dwelling of Chicken Sam.

CHAPTER XXVII

VOODOO

> ". . . Magic, cabala, spells,
> And every dark pursuit allied
> To curious and presumptuous pride;
> . . . Fired brain and nerves o'erstrung,
> And heart with mystic horrors wrung. . . .
> Then rose the cry of females, shrill
> As goss-hawk's whistle on the hill. . . ."
>
> WALTER SCOTT.

INSIDE the cabin they had begun to sing:—

"Mistah Voodoo Black Man — he come outen dey fire!
(H'm, h'm, h'm, *h'm!*
Ts, ts, ts, *ts!*)
Mistah Voodoo, he come howlin' outen hell fire!
An' groan (H'm, h'm!)
An' say (Ts, ts!)
Oh!
Anybody gwine ter be kill' to-day?
Oh! Oh! Oh! *Oh!*
Mistah Voodoo Man, he grin outen hell an' say:
'Anybody fo' me ter buhn to-day?'"

Rhythmic, yet irregular, the crooned chant had the monotonous and mesmeric qualities of a tom-tom. There was something elemental, primal, about it; human heartbeats, and nerves, and blood, and breathing, made audible.

It affected Juliet most unpleasantly. It was at the same time physical and symbolic, mystic and sensual. It oppressed the soul and the ear as much as the heavy air affected the lungs. It made Molly Davidge hysterical in a subdued way; she shivered, giggling silently, and pressed closer to Craig Evarts, her childish eyes wide with terror.

Louise, least sensitive of the three girls, was greatly interested and absorbed. The oppression had not touched her yet; she merely thought it astonishing and curious, full of the quality generally termed picturesque.

"Mis' Vampire Lady, she done come outen de tomb!
(H'm, h'm, h'm, *h'm!*
Ts, ts, ts, *ts!*)
Mis' Vampire Lady come up in dey gloom,
And sigh (H'm, h'm!)
And say (Ts, ts!)
Oh!
'Gimme dem daid men fo' mah dinner to-day!'
Oh! Oh! Oh! *Oh!*
Mis' Vampire Lady come outen dey tomb an' say:
'Gimme dem daid men fo' mah dinner to-day!'"

Three old colored women in turbans sat in the light of the fire and one dim oil lamp, with their black hands on their knees, rocking, rocking. They, as well as the men, smoked stubby pipes, their eyes were closed, and their expressions were frankly vacant. Their thick lips opened and closed loosely as they mouthed the words of their strange songs. The chairs

on which they sat creaked beneath their weight, for all three of them were colossally fat.

The fire smoked badly, and added thus to the heaviness of the air in the tiny, crowded room. The odors of cooked ham, onions, and some odd-smelling herbs hung about the greasy walls. Old vegetables were drying on strings hung from the ceilings. Some big pitchers and cups were set out on the table on one side of the room.

The cabin was filled with negroes, men and women. They were quiet enough, but there was a sort of fanatic look about their rolling eyes. They swayed, as though instinctively, to the erratic measure of the voodoo chant; and sometimes from one or another of them would come a low, murmuring exclamation.

Peaceable as they all appeared, and for the moment were — to Juliet came for the first time a shuddering sense of being in a strange land, in the power of an alien people. No savages, no goblins of the night, no animals of another order, or of another planet than her own could have seemed to her more unlike her kind, more out of sympathy. She had felt just so in bad dreams, when surrounded by unfriendly creatures, the creations of her restless brain.

She heard Evarts and the others talking amicably enough with the moon-faced Chicken Sam. The chant had stopped. The darkies stood about in outward stolidity, but darting bright, inquisitive glances at the strangers who had come to look at them as they would at a show.

"De witcher 'ooman, she be mighty late!" grumbled Rooster Sam, their host's father. He was a wizened old negro, with yellow eyes like a panther's.

"What witcher woman?" inquired Evarts, acting upon an interrogatory pinch from Molly.

"Ole witcher 'ooman, tur'ble pow'ful cunjer lady! She done figger on gettin' hyar to Libuhty Ridge, 'bout now, Ah reckon!"

"Might one ask," said Ramsay, with a polite curiosity that seemed ludicrous in the surroundings, "what's the conjure lady's name?"

"Myra, she done call herse'f, suh! We ain' none on us done see her yet. She tur'ble pow'ful cunjer lady!" repeated the old man, with a light in his yellow eyes. "She done talk wid de debbil, her ownse'f! Yas, suh!"

The three negresses here broke out into a wild sort of invocation to the snake creatures — the scaly things beloved of sorcerers from time immemorial: —

> "Rattlesnake, copperhaid,
> Blue racer, hoopsnake,
> Gyarter snake, grass snake,
> J'int snake, black snake —
> Come up an' talk;
> Come up an' walk.
> Mistah Woodpecker, he wants — yo' — *brains!*"

The last line rose sharply to an emphatic yell, ending even more sharply in silence.

The cunjer women were stooping over an old gray bag; the fire leaped luridly upon their crouching

figures. One woman's turban was dirty white, one was blue, spotted with yellow, one was as red as blood.

"Oh, heavens!" gasped Molly, with an uncontrollable shriek. "The bag is full of snakes!"

"Not real snakes." Louise was speaking in her most practical tone.

Suddenly they saw something wriggle slowly, melting into a heap of slimy-looking curves. A slender, wicked head rose against the firelight. Louise whitened to her lips, for she loathed reptiles, and said no more.

"The props," said Ramsay, precisely, "appear to be the real thing."

"It's all right!" Evarts muttered soothingly to the girls. "They're putting them back into the bag. Gad, though, I didn't know they did things so thoroughly!"

"They just wanted to see they were in good working order, I suppose, before the show!" said Charlie Moss, trying to joke.

But the men exchanged stealthy glances. Quiet as these colored people were, all the white visitors by this time had an underlying instinct of distrust and uneasiness.

From among the negroes, a figure glided forward, and said tranquilly: "Good evening!"

It was Kitty Turley. She was in a distant, inscrutable mood to-night, and gave Juliet a curious impression of infinite watchfulness. She spoke neither to Louise nor Juliet directly, but greeted the whole

Evartston crowd collectively, with something — it might be noted — of the air of a hostess.

Moss asked her if she was used to this sort of show. And she replied, with a shrug, that all "cunjer tricks" were pretty much the same. She had seen a great many, she acknowledged, in her lifetime.

Once or twice Juliet caught her looking at her with a calculating gaze, but she was extremely reticent, and clearly on her best behavior for the time being. One wondered how long it would last! The negroes seemed afraid of her, and she pushed them out of her way like so many cumbersome pieces of furniture.

One of the negresses threw something on to the fire, that gave out a faint, odd odor.

"Clover blossoms," said Kitty, carelessly. "All part of the cunjer tricks. There'll be woodpecker's blood next, I reckon — to make the ghosts come out nicely. And have you had any cakes yet?"

Louise shook her head.

"Aunt Cassy," called Kitty, loudly. "Where are your future cakes?"

Aunt Cassy was the old woman in the red turban — the largest and most monumentally fat of the three.

"Ah, didn' bake none yet, Miss Kitty, honey!" she said, with hesitating earnestness. "Ah thought mebbe ole Ma'm Myra, de witcher 'ooman, 'd lak to make her own future cakes."

Kitty laughed contemptuously, and turned once more to the white people.

"The future cakes," she explained, "are made of

honey, and whisky, and some sort of seeds. They're supposed to show what's going to happen, if you eat them at the dark of the moon!"

"I should never eat any at all!" said Molly, with a shiver. "I'd hate to know just what was going to happen, wouldn't you?"

"Sometimes," admitted Kitty, looking again at Juliet, "I dare say it's just as well not to know."

"We cyan' wait fo' Ma'm Myra no more," spoke up little old Rooster Sam. "We kin do cunjer work oursel's! Aunt Cassy is a plumb fine witcher 'ooman her ownse'f! Aunt Cassy, ain' yo' gwine do some voodoo fo' we-all?"

A chorus of voices caught up the burden:—

"Ma'm Cassy — Ma'm Cassy! Ain' yo' gwine do some voodoo fo' we-all?"

The old woman rocked to and fro for a minute without speaking. Then she took her clay pipe from her mouth, and harshly cried, in a groaning sort of croak:—

"Whar am de snakes? Ah cyan' do no voodoo 'thouten mah snakes!"

She closed her eyes, and rocked, holding the pipe on her knee. Suddenly it dropped and broke. She began to mutter the words of the invocation:—

"Rattlesnake, copperhaid,
Come up an' talk!
Blue racer, black snake,
Come up an' walk!
Mistah Woodpecker an' me, we wants yo' *brains!*"

Somebody brought her the bag of snakes — it undulated horribly as it was held up, and she opened it with violent yet awkward gestures, that looked like those of a drunken person or a sleepwalker.

Then suddenly, while the negroes craned their necks with a hideous zest, to see the better, she turned the squirming bag upside down, and emptied out the living snakes upon the fire.

Molly shrieked aloud, and hid her face. The white men swore with disgust, and started forward.

But Juliet was before them. She crossed the foul little room with a sort of stately rush, and caught up a shovel standing by the fireplace. But before she could make any effort to get the creatures out of the flames, one of them escaped unaided, and came straight at her, with darting head. It was a long, mottled thing, clearly a rattler. Instinctively, Juliet shrank.

The next moment the negroes, with guttural cries, had closed in about the fire, and Evarts had pulled her away by force. He was very white.

"Wasn't it a rattlesnake?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, but without the fangs," Kitty put in.

She was regarding Juliet oddly. The latter now realized that several of the negroes had also turned, and were pointing her out to each other with rolling eyes and whispered comments.

"Now what's up with them?" demanded Evarts, with irritable suspicion.

"A burning snake is supposed to point out the next person present doomed to die," said Kitty.

"Is that all?" said Juliet, and smiled at her.

"Wh-what did they do with the snake?" quavered Molly Davidge.

"It's burned up with its fellows by this time," said Ramsay, with open disgust. "A very pretty entertainment, I must say!"

"Oh, I say!" murmured Tommy Norton. "How very beastly, you know!" He was feeling quite ill.

"Well, they would have it!" remarked Moss, brutally, regarding the pale cheeks of the girls.

It was just at this moment that some one knocked loudly on the door of the cabin. Four knocks there were, slow and heavy. It sounded like a man's hand, but when Chicken Sam opened his door, it was the bowed, black-swathed figure of a negro woman who stood there.

She was wrapped in a big black cloak, and a black shawl was draped over her head, half hiding her dark face, but what could be seen was grim and forbidding. She raised a large black hand, making a sign that the negroes seemed to understand. They groaned, and muttered greetings in varying keys.

"Ma'm Myra!" said Chicken Sam, reverentially.

"The witcher 'ooman!" added his father, peering with his old yellow eyes.

She nodded slowly, without speaking, and with a heavy limping step, entered the cabin.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WITCH WOMAN

"Now, who supposed the night would play us such a prank? . . ."
ROBERT BROWNING.

THE witch woman clearly was a person to be treated with respect.

She was at once given a seat by the fire, and a generous cup of liquor from the jug. This last she refused with an ungracious shake of the head. She seemed in no sense disposed to be friendly, but the fact rather increased her prestige with the tyranny-loving darkies. She sat, huddled in a chair, holding her shawl about her with a large and muscular black hand, the while she drew circles with her foot upon the floor, and muttered to herself. Occasionally fragments of her soliloquy reached the rest; it dealt for the most part with "Blood an' fire; fire an' blood! Blood dat flows, an' fire dat destroys!"

"She am a pow'ful witcher 'ooman!" declared old Rooster Sam, with respect.

"Yas, suh!" admitted the deposed Aunt Cassy, with a sigh. "She sure am a pow'ful cunjer lady!"

Aunt Cassy evidently regretted her own displacement as sorceress of the occasion, but she was not resentful. She abdicated in favor of a mightier hand.

Kitty Turley watched the new witch with a puzzled

face. She kept near to her — as near as the worshiping crowd of negroes would permit, and stared at her constantly. Once she paused in front of the crouching figure, and looked straight into her face. She and the witcher woman regarded each other for ten seconds without the stir of an eyelash. Then Kitty laughed, and left her.

Juliet, meeting her glance a minute later, was startled. The girl was chalk-white, and her eyes scintillated with what looked to be fury. It seemed as though such a regard must burn what it lighted on. "She looks like a witch herself!" whispered Molly. "Glory! did you ever see such a malevolent expression? Let's keep out of her way!"

"Really," said Ramsay, with a shrug, "I can't see what you would expect of a young lady who admits that she had made a practice of attending these — these performances!"

"Brutalizing affairs!" admitted Evarts, cynically. "Look at them all now, if you please!"

The negroes had begun to drink deeply of the fiery, crude liquor that they affected. Kitty helped Aunt Cassy and Chicken Sam to pass the jugs and cups around. The white people wisely refused to taste the stuff, and went without refreshment thankfully, but the blacks swallowed it like so much lemonade. There was nothing to eat — the new witch having refused the honor of making any future cakes — and the raw spirits had every chance to work in the excited brains.

Kitty, carrying a pitcher of the spirits, passed close to Juliet, and, whether by accident or design no one could say, spilled half the contents of the jug over the other girl's shoulder. It soaked into the heavy wool of her gown, and Juliet could feel it tingle on the skin of her arm underneath.

"You'll have to be careful not to get where there's any fire," Charlie Moss warned her soberly. "That poison is confoundedly inflammable!"

"Too bad!" said Kitty, with a mocking inflection in her voice. She did not look sorry; she looked, on the contrary, triumphant.

Under her breath she added, muttering the words in Juliet's ear: "I warned you! I warned you! Now you must pay; you must take your medicine! You've broken your word!"

She flashed sparks of hate at Juliet, and then, veiling her fierce eyes with her lids, passed on.

Juliet could not guess what she meant, and for the time being she dismissed the question. She was becoming seriously absorbed in the state of the negroes.

Incantations, spells, songs, magic circles, burning herbs, sacrificed snakes, and the blood of a woodbird, recently slain, which had been sprinkled on the hearth — these things had made them well-nigh as drunk with superstitious frenzy as with alcohol. Between these two exciting influences they were rapidly becoming beside themselves.

They stamped and groaned and shouted, their great

mouths opened cavernously to emit the raucous sounds. Their black faces dripped and shone with sweat.

And they drank and drank, and crooned and crooned, and always they kept piling the fire higher and higher, till the small room was like a furnace, and thick with hot smoke. The sinister crimson and yellow light disclosed every latent bestiality in the black faces. The sickening smell of the close room made the whole thing seem like a devil-inspired nightmare.

"Faugh!" exclaimed Evarts, suddenly. "Let's get out of this!"

It was precisely at that moment that the topmost log on the monster fire fell blazing and crackling out into the room.

The negroes scattered before it; the table cover caught from the shower of ascending sparks, and in a moment the whole room was in flames.

Evarts and his party had started for the door, but the confusion and panic now made it impossible to make a step of headway. They fell back, as far away from the fire as they could get, and waited drawn up close to the wall of the room.

There were several sharp, shrill, negro screams, as the flame leaped and spread, and Aunt Cassy heaved her huge bulk up from her chair with a convulsed black countenance.

"A sign!" she yelled. "It am a sign, chillen! De sp'its and boogers, dey done gib we-all a sign!"

"De brack people agin' de white!" droned Rooster Sam, with his teeth bared in a fanatic snarl. "De brack agin' de white!"

"Glory! Glory!" shrieked the raucous voices, on all sides. "De fire am come to burn up de white folks — yas, suh! De fire! Glory be — glory be! De fire am a-come!"

Evarts flung out an arm to pull first one and then another of the girls into a safer position. Very quietly and promptly, little Tommy Norton did the same. Ramsay and Moss, cool and steady, braced themselves between the women and the seething room.

"We're all right!" came Juliet's calm voice. "Is the door blocked?"

Louise was gasping for breath in the smoky air.

"S-surely," stammered poor little Molly Davidge, clinging to Evarts, and trying to be plucky, "we aren't in any real d-danger, are we? Why don't they move and — and let us out of this awful room?"

"Because," said Ramsay, carefully wiping his glasses — he was as blind as an owl without them — "because, my dear young lady, they like a good blaze while they are about it. They consider us fuel sent straight from heaven — or hell!"

"But," quavered Molly, persistently, "what harm have we done to them?"

"We've been born white, that's all!" said Evarts, between his teeth. "Look at their faces!"

And as they stared in horror at the ebony counte-

nances pressing up about them, they saw plainly enough that not the violent, hungry flames themselves were more cruel than the hate they read there!

Evarts suddenly shouted a football order, and Moss promptly hurled himself upon the confused mass of struggling darkies, and began to shoulder his way through them.

"Follow me up quick!" he called. "Get hold of the girls, and make the rush with me, you fellows!"

One of the negroes, with a crazy laugh, made a grab at Juliet's arm. Evarts struck him full in the face on the instant. The fellow went down like a log, striking his head against the sharp corner of the table. He lay still, with dark blood streaming out on to the dirty board floor.

In just one second the room passed from uproar to pandemonium itself.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Ramsay, bracing himself resignedly. "Now, you've done it!"

The negroes wanted blood for blood. They surrounded the white people, even forgetting the menace of the flames that now licked the ceiling of the little cabin. Only Chicken Sam sobbed and wrung his fat black hands, seeing his house burn up over his woolly head.

The now wholly maddened blacks, cursing, shrieking, and threatening, had by this time hemmed Evarts in. Molly, half fainting, was clinging to Juliet's steady arm. Louise was crying loudly and affrightedly, and did not even know that she was. Evarts,

white but cool enough, fought off the murderous black hands that were clutching at him.

Charlie Moss was separated from his friend by half a dozen struggling darkies. When Ramsay tried to get by to the others, Kitty deliberately flung a cup of spirits in his face, shattering his glasses, and momentarily blinding him with the smart. She was absolutely silent, but held herself in a tense, crouching attitude, like a catamount waiting for its spring. Heart and soul, it was easy to see, she was with the negroes, and against the white party.

Suddenly, above the tumult, sounded a single sharp command: —

"Stop!"

It was the cunjer woman, who had risen from her seat, and stood before them, hunched and stooping, but grimly impressive. With upraised hand, she dominated the uproar, and the negroes hushed each other to listen to what she had to say.

"Nebber min' de white trash!" she said, speaking slowly and in a deep voice. "Git water fo' dat fire, you-all lazy niggers, you! An' open de do's an' winders. Now you-all go right along, an' do's I say! I's Ma'm Myra, I is, an' you-all niggers is plumb boun' to 'bey me! Skedaddle now!"

There was no question about this being the voice of authority. Clearly Ma'm Myra was used to being obeyed, and expected to be so now. The very assurance of her tone and manner did the trick. The tension wavered and lifted. The danger was not

past, but the sorely tried Evartston people saw hope glimmer ahead of them.

The negroes, inherently born to be ruled, and that roughly, began to obey the witch blindly. Some one opened the door, and a merciful current of pure air rushed into the foul little place. Several men were now helping Chicken Sam to put out the fire. Two others were assisting the now conscious man that Evarts had knocked down to sit up.

Slowly, cautiously, protected by the authoritative figure of the cunjer woman, the white people began to make a faltering progress to the outer world. The men fought down, for the women's sake, their earnest desire to make a gallant exit. Alone, they might have made a rush for it, but if the girls could be gotten out quietly, with no fuss, why, so much the better. But they chafed and grimaced as they walked with apparent nonchalance toward the door, under the savage eyes of the baffled blacks.

Suddenly there was a queer, shrill cry, like that of a wild cat; and Kitty Turley darted across the room, straight at Juliet.

Juliet's impression of what followed was very vague. She saw Kitty pick up a small kerosene lamp which had stood on the table, and lift it high in the air above her head, as though she were about to fling it at her.

"Juliet!" cried Louise, in a tone of horror. "Oh, take care!"

Juliet closed her eyes instinctively, and put up her hands to shield her face.

At the same moment, she felt herself seized forcibly, lifted bodily in a pair of strong arms, and heard a fresh outburst of excitement. She had seen Evarts spring forward just as she flung up her hands to guard her face, but she knew that it was not he who was carrying her.

The uproar receded into the distance, as she was carried rapidly out of the heat and glare into the blessed cold and darkness of the night. The smell and feel of frost was in her nostrils, and the sound of dry twigs and withered leaves crackling under a swift foot was in her ears.

"It is all a dream — all!" she thought, as she was borne on. "In a moment I shall wake!"

For though she had not yet opened her eyes, she knew that she was in Derry's arms.

CHAPTER XXIX

RESCUED

"It's neither fear nor duty,
It's neither quick nor dead
Shall gar me withdraw the plighted hand,
Or break the word once said."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

IN a minute he set her down gently and she stood there, a trifle unsteady now that the tension was over, and looked at him quietly.

He had flung away the witch woman's shawl and cloak, and was dressed as usual. The lampblack on his hands and face did not show in the starlight, but, as he leaned toward her, she could see — or thought she could — the anguish of anxiety in his dark eyes.

"I've got black stuff all over your gown!" was the first thing he said to her. "You aren't hurt, girl? You're certain sure you aren't hurt?"

"No." She smiled at him shakily in the darkness. Her thirsty eyes never left his.

He looked back at her — a long, deep look, and caught his breath.

"I didn't suppose," he said in a low tone, "that I'd ever see you again. I didn't mean to, you know."

She started, and shrank. For a magical moment she had forgotten his abandonment of her through

those blank weeks of waiting. Now she remembered that — and other things.

"I've only just found out that I'm a free man, after all," he said. "I didn't know before that Nat got well."

"I know."

She seemed only able to speak in breaths, in monosyllables. Some strength had gone out of her.

He made a quick, impatient gesture. "God knows why she didn't give me the signal right! God knows why she did it! And I suppose *she* knows! It drove me nearly mad — not to come to you." He paused, and she could hear his labored breath. In a moment he added, in a different tone: "But now —"

He stopped, and she could feel his eyes on hers, though the darkness hung between them. Love and life, and what they had to give, came close to her in that moment, and she knew it.

"Now," said Juliet, very simply, "it's too late. You know that, too?"

"No! How do you mean — too late?"

He spoke quickly, roughly. She could see more plainly now that she was growing used to the dim light. She could see his eyes, and they glittered oddly, as he bent closer to her, and waited for her reply.

"You don't know," Juliet said, "that I am going to marry Mr. Evarts?"

There was a short, dead silence.

"Is that true?" he said.

"Yes."

Another pause. "I see," he said dully. "You must let me take you back to the others now. To — him. They are out all right now; I can hear their voices. Listen!"

Somebody crying hysterically was approaching. Juliet recognized the high and plaintive note as belonging to Molly Davidge. Accompanying it came the deeper echo of masculine voices on the night air.

"Oh!" Juliet started, filled with compunction for a moment. "I have been cowardly to forget them! How did they get out, I wonder?"

He shrugged his shoulders in the dimness.

"They were all right. The men were equal to that much, I reckon. There wasn't any danger, just at the last there. But Kitty would have hurt *you*, I reckon, if I hadn't grabbed you up when I did."

"She recognized you, didn't she?"

"Yes, right away! *You* didn't."

"I was in a sort of daze," Juliet said simply. "I have been that way for a long time now. Things don't seem to have been real to me."

He gave a little, low exclamation, that might have been pain, or pity, or love — or all three. Then, as though he feared himself, he said hurriedly: "I'm pretty glad I got there when I did. They were right crazy, the lot of them. And you might have been hurt."

"*She* hates me!"

He said nothing to that.

Suddenly it seemed to Juliet that she could not bear his silence, his coldness, his aloofness. Hardly recognizing herself, she stretched out her hands to him. Her face was silver pale as she raised it toward him under the white stars.

"Don't you understand why I did it?" she said. "Can't you see why I said I would — marry — him? You had gone away — and I waited. And you didn't come — you didn't come! Though I waited for you day after day! Of course, I thought you'd gotten the signal, and — and didn't *want* to come. And I was so lonely —" Her voice broke. As she talked she felt the hopelessness of making him, of making any man understand her. "You didn't come," she repeated drearily, and fell silent.

"And now it's too late," said the man.

Then he put out his hands, and caught hers in a close, warm grip.

"I do understand!" he muttered low and rapidly. "I reckon I do understand, girl! And, even if I didn't — I love you! It isn't too late — it can't be! People don't feel our way for nothing. It couldn't be just wasted; if it could be, there wouldn't be any sense in anything on earth! It isn't too late! Listen, now: I'll wait for you in the Under Trail to-morrow night. Come to me! Oh, my girl, come to me then, and tell me that it's not too late, and that you'll come away with me somewhere where we can be free — free together!"

"I can't — I can't!" she gasped.

"You can — and you must! You owe me that much!"

"I can't come," she said again, struggling with her own breath.

In the darkness his face came close to hers, so close that his eyes burned into her own.

"You can't — not come!" he said softly. "You can't keep away! We love each other! Hush! They are coming!"

He pressed his lips to both her hands, and suddenly melted into the shadows.

The others came stumbling and complaining through the thicket of crooked trees.

"Of all the damnable nights!" said Evarts, stopping to wipe his forehead. "All right, Juliet? I thought at first the old woman had kidnapped you!"

Juliet started. So they did not suspect!

"The — old — woman — saved my life!" she said, steadily enough.

"Where is she?" demanded Evarts. "There was something fishy about her, in my opinion."

"I haven't the least idea," returned Juliet, truthfully.

"Just dropped you, and cleared out?"

"That's all."

Louise was still crying. She clung to Juliet, unaccountably, unwontedly demonstrative.

"That horrible girl!" she sobbed. "I never dreamed — I believe she honestly meant to hurt you, Juliet! Oh, what a fool I've been." She

had a fresh burst of weeping. "What a fool I've been!"

"And what a fool you are, Louise!" interrupted her brother, curtly. "Button up your coat, and try to control yourself."

Louise still sobbed weakly, and to the undying astonishment of everybody, Tommy Norton rose to the occasion. He had done nothing very daring in the cabin, but, as they now recalled, he had stood his ground gamely, though pale with terror, and had not tried to run away.

He now drew Louise's shaking arm inside his own, and with his free hand felt in his pocket.

"Have some?" he remarked politely. And the wretched members of the Evartston voodoo party fell, with cries of gratitude, upon the whisky flask which he produced.

Somewhat revived, they made their way down the cold and lonely trail. Halfway down they met Doctor Clement and two other men on horseback, with lanterns swinging cheerily from their saddles.

The doctor pulled up, and swore with relief when he saw them.

"All safe, eh?" he demanded irascibly. "Not a single fool missing?"

Evarts gave him a brief account of the evening.

"Better than you deserve!" was the doctor's heartless comment. "Of all the imbecile expeditions! See here, you'd all better go into Mack's and get hot drinks and a rest before you go home."

Something moved in the bushes near them.

Molly, whose nerves were shaken, gave a little shriek.

"Now what?" exclaimed Ramsay, resignedly. "A fresh attack?"

Into the circle of lantern light at this point walked a little old colored woman, with a mild, wrinkled face, and a snowy turban. She was bundled up in shawls and neckerchiefs and comforters and scarfs, but she looked cold and weary and depressed.

"Kin you-all tell me de way to de ho'se of a nigger man called Sam?" she asked in a soft, minor drawl.

"Chicken Sam?" queried half a dozen voices in varying keys.

"Yas, suh. Dere's a cunjer meetin' up dar."

"The Lord knows there is!" exclaimed Evarts, with heartfelt fervor.

The little old negress looked at him in meek surprise.

"Yas, suh. I wuz gwine dar, but Ah met a gen'leman, a white gen'leman, early in de ebenin', an' he sent me fo' mile outen mah way. Ah cert'nly wants to git dar, suh, 'case —"

A sudden idea had struck Evarts, and he broke in.

"What is your name, my good woman?" he demanded.

"I'se called Myra, suh — Ma'm Myra," rejoined she, very humbly.

So this was the true witcher woman! They stared at each other's startled faces in the lantern light.

"Then who was the other one?" exclaimed Molly, who was feeling better.

"Some impostor!" said Evarts. "It's no matter now, anyway. We're out of it, all right."

The doctor threw back his rough head, and laughed loud and long at the stars. When he had finished laughing, he happened to glance at Juliet, and upon her white face there was just the ghost of a sympathetic smile.

Ma'm Myra was redirected in her pilgrimage to the voodoo gathering, and the homeward-toiling party proceeded on its way.

Down in the warm and brightly lighted shack of Mackanerny, Louise exclaimed loudly as she brushed off Juliet's tan coat.

"It's covered with black smoochy stuff!" she cried. "And, oh, Juliet, do look at your hands!"

Juliet's pale, tired face flamed scarlet as she glanced down. Her white fingers held in lampblack the print of Derry's lips.

"The motor is ready, girls — do hurry up!" announced Evarts' weary voice from the door.

"Molly," said Louise, sarcastically, as they started for home, "I hope you had as *wonderful* an evening as you expected!"

CHAPTER XXX

MADNESS

> She . . . sighed for sleep that would not hear,
> But left her tossing still, for night and day
> A mighty hunger yearned within her heart,
> Till all her veins ran fever. . . ."
>
> CHARLES KINGSLEY.

ALL that night, and all the next day, Juliet fought the devils and the wolves in the wilderness of her own soul. The sight of Derry's eyes, the sound of his voice, the sense of his dear nearness, had broken down her resistance. She was again at sea, again despairing — above all, she was again filled with the madness of her heart's need of him.

She prayed for strength to be true to Craig, she lashed and scourged her own tenderness till she writhed, she called up the still faces of Duty and of Peace to stand between her and her temptation. For it was a temptation — not the less, but the more because she was a good woman, pure and upright in intent as well as in life. To her, the sin of loving another man than he whom she was pledged to marry was a deep one; yet it appeared to her a greater wrong to consider the cowardly breaking of her engagement. Such things

were done by the weaklings of the world, the beings who had not strength to be unhappy. Was she one of those creatures, so exceedingly despised throughout her sane and strong and candid life?

There is no need to follow her through those stormy hours that left her at sundown that Thursday night ruthlessly, insanely determined to see Derry again.

She told herself that it was because she wanted to say good-by to him forever; but her leaping pulses and the hot, unshed tears that burned her eyelids told her in return that she was going because she must see him once more — because she must touch his hand, and hear him speak, or she should die.

She pleaded a headache, and stayed in her room all day. While the rest were dressing for dinner, she put on a riding habit, went out to the stables, and had the dappled mare saddled.

The sun had set in a bank of black clouds, and it was quite dark when she rode down the mountain side, going on the turf so that the mare's hoofs should make no noise. She knew that it would not occur to the stablemen to report her visit there, nor her departure with the mare, unless they were questioned. And Miss Evarts and Louise had promised not to disturb her until some time during the evening after dinner. So she was safe, in all probability, for at least a couple of hours. And by that time she would be back.

What manner of night it was through which she rode Juliet could never afterward recall. To her it was a great black vacuum filled with nothing — nothing but

her own madness. The winds that surged about her spoke with the voice of her desire; the sky above her head was only the roof of her aching heart.

She had often ridden the dappled mare before, but the little beast had never found her rider so reckless. Juliet did not press the horse, only let her out to the full of the gallant creature's will; and the frost-rimmed hedges sped by in the half light like dreams, and the little mare curvetted around corners and galloped down pebbly stretches, with never a word of remonstrance from the human being on her back.

It was with no sentient determination nor definite planning that the girl chose the upper trail past Chicken Sam's house, that led to Crazy Run, and thence to the subterranean passageway. She had ridden a good deal over the Ridge in the past few weeks, and was familiar with the used and unused bridle paths, so she did not expect to have any difficulty in finding her way. She did not want to go by Evarts' new road — the "main trail," as it was still called. The thought of meeting Mackaneny or any of the men who knew her by sight was dreadful to her — not, to be honest, because she felt consciously ashamed of what she was doing, but because their limited minds might put upon her presence a vulgar construction. Ah! The very thought was like a blow upon the passionate delicacy of the sentiment she guarded so jealously.

So it was the same path taken by the voodoo party the night before which it now suited her to follow, and

upon which she accordingly started. She knew that Crazy Run flowed on its headlong course a scant half mile above Sam's cabin. She knew, too, that there was the Shutter, the great, movable rock resting in its natural socket, so nicely balanced that a child's hand could swing it in and out of the position which masked the upper entrance to the Under Trail.

She rode on and up in a feverish dream, unconscious of time, not even feeling the cold that enveloped her. The flame in her heart burned out every secondary thing, every lighter thought, every lesser sensation.

It was with a shock that she suddenly found herself misled by the darkness, off the familiar trail. She was obviously, disconcertingly lost! She was by this time too accustomed to the mountains to feel any terror, but the discovery startled her out of her introspective and passionately absorbed mood, like a cold needle bath. She found herself obliged to consider her whereabouts, and the next thing which it was best for her to do, and the necessity was very good for her.

With the arousing of her practical sense, and the clearing of the mists of mad impulse, came the return both of her sense of humor and her natural daring. It was at the promptings of both that she suddenly decided to ride to the Turleys' house and ask her way to the Shutter! She began to see, by this time, that she must be on that little by-path that zigzagged off from the main trail below — the scene of that long-ago meeting with Derry. Somewhere, a

few hundred yards farther on, the grim Turley domicile should be situated, if her bump of location was not nonexistent. And it was to that unfriendly roof beneath which she had passed one of the least agreeable hours of her life that she was now directing her horse!

She laughed aloud as she dwelt on this proposition, and her own laugh, echoing freshly among the shadows and the twisted trees, did her good. She patted the mare's neck, and the willing little creature quickened her step and danced a bit, to show that the returned interest was appreciated.

It was only a few minutes before she saw a light which she knew must be burning in the house where, once upon a time, she had nearly lost her life. She urged the mare forward, feeling that sudden impulse toward a lighted window which the wayfarer nearly always experiences on dark, cold nights.

The light was a feeble, unwelcoming one, but it served to make her dismount, tie her mare to a tree, and boldly approach the door. Her knock brought prompt answer. There was the sound of a chair pushed back, a heavy step, and — she found herself almost immediately smiling up into Dan Turley's lean and grim old face, as he scowled anxiously at her in the doorway.

"Better luck this time than on my last visit!" she said audaciously. Indeed, she felt utterly reckless and foolhardy, and scarcely knew herself. "How are you, Mr. Turley?"

Dan frowned at her more deeply still, and growled:

"It's the nursing gyurl!" So, she recalled, he had greeted her once before.

"Yes." She smiled, as she had smiled then.

Looking past him, she could see Nat Mooney sitting by the table — that same, cumbrous table that she remembered with so much distressing clearness. "The whole brood together!" she thought, with a sort of inward grimace. What an unsavory crowd it was, to be sure!

Turley was regarding her, without graciousness, it is true, but also, for the moment, without resentment. Indeed, he appeared to be at present remarkably sane.

"What are you-all doin' hyar?" he demanded gruffly.

"I've lost my way!" Juliet explained, with entire cheerfulness. "Oh, is that you, Mr. Mooney? Good evening! You see, I hoped to get to the Shutter as early in the evening as possible. Can you direct me?"

"What do you-all wan' ter go to the Shutter fo'?" said Dan Turley, suspiciously. "What do you-all want of the Shutter at this time o'night?"

"I've heard it's a point of interest," remarked Juliet, recklessly. "I'm not a revenue officer, you know!" she added — and she laughed.

Nat Mooney openly sneered, half lifting his big head as he sat heavily by the table.

"Thought you knew the way there mighty well," he said insolently.

"I beg your pardon?" said Juliet, politely, suddenly turning blank eyes in his direction.

"I say — I thought — most people knew the way there," he mumbled, making his retreat with a bad grace.

"Oh! Well, *I* don't know it, as it happens! Oh, by the by, where's your daughter, Mr. Turley?"

To hear her, one would have thought that Juliet and Kitty were friends and neighbors accustomed to the constant interchange of calls.

"We're waitin' fo' her!" old Dan grunted unwillingly. "We-all ain' had our supper yet!"

"That's too bad!" Juliet suddenly was conscious of an agreeable smell. "I hoped she would give me a cup of coffee. Perhaps *you* will?"

Turley did not move; his eyes were dull and lackluster. It was doubtful if he had even heard her request. But Nat rose sullenly, and took the steaming coffeepot from the fire. As he did so, he gave vent to a muttered exclamation.

"See here, Dan," he called with a startled note in his voice. "There's a letter stickin' up over the fireplace fer you. Did you know that, eh?"

"Letter?" Dan regarded him without understanding. "What letter?"

"A letter for you here. Say, you're no more nutty than I am when you don't like! What d'you put on that 'where-am-I' look fer?"

"I ain't had no letter," muttered the old man.

"Well, you come on in, an' look at this. It's got yer name on it, all right."

Turley walked heavily and slowly across the room, and took the little folded note in his long bony fingers. The two men bent over it together.

"Why — it's from Kitty!" said Nat, in a queer voice.

Turley nodded, with a dumfounded look. Then they read it.

Juliet, accustomed to reading faces, moved slowly inside the room as she watched them read. She could not guess the contents of the note, but it was something potential in its effects upon these two men. What mischief, she asked herself, was that little beast Kitty up to now?

Suddenly, there was a choked oath from Nat, and old Dan, with a deep, harsh cry of grief and despair, dropped into a chair by the table, and hid his face in his gaunt old arms.

Juliet walked straight to the table, and caught up the note without ceremony. Nat made a clumsy pass at it, as though to prevent her seeing it, but she brushed him aside with an impatient gesture. It was only afterward that it dawned upon her that she had done rather a dreadful thing in reading the letter without permission. At the time, she merely held it closer to the light, and read it through.

It was written in Kitty's blotted, unformed handwriting: —

I reckon you'll feel pretty bad, dad, but there's nothing else for me to do now. I've gone away to Derry —

Juliet's eyes felt strange; the words swam before them, and she was so dizzy that she had to put one hand upon the table to keep from falling. In a moment she was able to read on, while Dan Turley sobbed in his chair, and Nat watched her read, with the blank, suffering eyes of some beaten dog.

— You never rightly knew what was between us, though I reckon you were sometimes mighty close to guessing, and I know you never liked him. Well, he's treated me badly, dad — the same as Joe Rainor treated the Crew girl last spring — and now it's too late. He wants to desert me, but I'll never let him live to do that. I'll marry him, or I'll kill him. Any how, I've gone to him. I'd ask you to come and back me up with Derry, only I've been trouble enough to you already, old dad, and I reckon this makes you well rid of your good-for-nothing KITTEN.

P.S. — I'm going to Derry at the Shutter to-night.

Juliet stood staring, horrified, at the paper in her hand, and as she stood and stared, she heard Nat Mooney say in a slow, dreary, puzzled tone: "She don't say anythin' about me. She don't mention my name even, does she? We was to have been married, an' she don't even mention my name!"

The mists and horror in Juliet's brain were suddenly dried by a flame of indignation. She knew, absolutely and irrefutably, that in word and spirit the whole letter was false — cruelly, wickedly false. For some reason that she could not fathom, Kitty had done this thing.

"The little hypocrite!" she breathed, sick with

disgust and anger. "The diabolical, unwomanly little hypocrite!"

Dan Turley caught the one word, and raised his heavy shoulders from his arms. His eyes were red and wild.

"Hypocrite! That he is!" he groaned. "Curse him! Curse him! To ruin mah gyurl — the proudest-hearted young thing on the Ridge! Him to drag her down! Curse him! Ah cert'nly curse him this night!"

"But, good heavens!" exclaimed Juliet, vehemently, "you can't really believe that he — he treated your daughter dishonorably?"

"She says so," said the old man, doggedly. "She says so, an' what Kitty says goes!"

It was the old loyal formula. Juliet recalled with a sense of bafflement and despair the blind faith of the father. There was, of course, as she might have remembered — no use in trying to make him see reason where Kitty was concerned.

"But," she persisted, as gently as she could, "don't you think it's very unlikely that that sort of thing could have gone on for a very long time without your suspecting? Don't you think —"

"'Fore he went away, two months ago, they were together a whole lot," said Turley. He talked in a curiously toneless, expressionless voice; his mouth trembled and twitched. "They were together a whole lot," he repeated.

"An' mebbe," put in Nat Mooney, thrusting for-

ward his puffy face, that had suddenly become tragic, "mebbe he never went away at all. Mebbe he's been hidin' in the hill all the while, an' her seein' him! Mebbe —"

"Gawd blast him!" interrupted the old man. He spoke in a great, shaking voice. It had the husky tremolo of a very ancient vox humana stop.

So far he was peculiarly controlled and contained. Juliet, however, waited for the storm to break. She knew that any moment this abnormal composure was likely to crack under some mental convulsion. And if Dan Turley went to pieces now, in his really great trouble and anxiety, it would probably be for life. She had a passing flash of indignation to spare for the daughter who could take such risks with her father's reason, and all for some shabby trick!

She tried to talk with him quietly about the matter. "In any case," she said, in her most reasonable, soothing tone, "she does not want you to do anything. You can only wait."

But even as she spoke she had her misgivings. She felt very certain that he would not wait.

Dan Turley heaved his big, angular framework upright.

"That's what she does want!" he exclaimed, with the first glint of unrestrained excitement showing for a second in his eye. "She wants me to go an' force him to marry her — the deceivin' devil!"

"She does not say so!" remonstrated Juliet, but her

heart sank. She had a sense of trying to ward off a hurricane with a gossamer screen.

"No, ma'am — she don't say so. But she wants it!" said old Turley, simply. She whom he adored had called him — not with words but with intent — and he obeyed the call. There was something impressive and terrible in his figure as he stood there, fighting dumbly with his madness and his pain, clinging in blind, agonized obstinacy to the one great thing shouting in his head — his daughter needed him; he must somehow contrive to keep himself sane and steady enough to go to her.

"I'm a-goin'," he said. "I'm a-goin' to the Shutter to-night!"

CHAPTER XXXI

IMPRISONED

"Give all to love;
. . . . .
It was not for the mean;
It requireth courage stout,
Souls above doubt,
Valor unbending;
Such 'twill reward."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

"YOU are going to the Shutter!" exclaimed Juliet. How could she ward off this new danger?

"Yes. And that's another thing, though Ah didn' think of it fuhst off. She wouldn't have tol' me where she was a-goin', if she hadn' wanted me to come!"

"I'm comin', too," said Nat, suddenly.

"You-all keep outen this!" growled the old man, threateningly. "You-all ain' her father!"

"No," said Nat Mooney, obstinately. "But I was a-goin' to marry her. I guess I've some rights."

"You fool, yo' keep out!" repeated Turley, angrily. "Ah'm a-goin' to get that chap to marry huh, or shoot him daid!"

"I ain't," said Nat Mooney, and his loose lips opened in a grin of hate. "I'm a-goin' ter get a bunch of the boys an' string him up — that's what I'm a-goin' to do!"

Juliet started forward.

"You're going to do *what?*" she gasped.

"Git my pals, and string him up for stealin' my gal."

Juliet remembered now that she had heard of Nat Mooney's cronies — the riffraff of the valley, the young negroes and low white trash of the hills, men who had been discharged from the road workings or the hotel, all the scum, and all the discards of the community. Drunkards, idlers, and cheap rascals, they were despised by reputable folk, but they were not without power of an unsavory sort. Collectively, they represented mob feeling in its primitive form. They might do Derry serious harm, and by force of numbers and the plea of the ostensible provocation, they might later get the condonement of popular feeling.

"But you can't," she faltered. "It's illegal — "

Nat grinned at her, that same loose-mouthed grin; and cold vengeance looked out of his eyes. The man was beside himself with his wrong.

"Ever hear of lynch law?" he said. "I reckon a feller that's lost his girl *that way* kin call out lynch law to help him out!"

A very short time ago Juliet had been mad, obsessed by her own selfish longing to see Derry, lost to every sane and calm consideration. Probably nothing could have so completely sobered her as this rapid awakening to the very real fact of his danger. She felt vaguely ashamed of the emotional intoxication which had brought her on this mad night ride to the

hills, but she had not time for even so much self-analysis. She was earnestly, unaffectedly thankful that she had come, whatever had inspired her coming. Never mind her madness, and the disloyal thoughts of which she had been guilty; she was here, and once again it was her task to carry to the man she loved the news of his imminent peril. She must go to him in the Trail, even as she had planned — but under what different circumstances! — and she must in some way save him from Dan Turley's bullet and Nat Mooney's lynching party.

So busily was her mind working that she hardly noticed the two men talking together, until she heard Turley say: —

"Mebbe she won't let you hang him."

"We shan't ask her!" said Nat, viciously. "Look-a-here, Dan. Me and Kitty's been keepin' company, off and on, fer a long while — a darned long while. She's twisted me round her little finger, same as she's twisted you. But she ain't goin' to do it no more! Not now she's got — she's got another feller!"

Juliet was vaguely surprised to see the pain in the man's look. There was the ring of sincere if venomous emotion in his voice.

"Well, Nat," said old Turley, slowly, "Ah reckon — mebbe — that much is your right. Ah ain' interferin'. But it'll be in front of her. Don't yo' go forgittin' that — it'll be in front of her."

Juliet shrank a little as she listened. "In front of her!" Of *her!* For the moment she had forgotten

that part of it. Derry and Kitty were together, and she of all persons was proposing to go to them!

Then in the instantaneous way that a great crisis or emergency makes one grasp a situation, she saw that in spite of that fact, possibly because of that, she must help Derry — must even save him if need be. Quickly and confidently now she made her plans for what she had to do. Time enough for doubts and for silly self-consciousness when the peril should be past.

She looked from one to the other of the two men, and laughed. "And what," she said, "do you expect me to be doing, while you two are going about hanging people, or shooting them — whichever of you gets there first?"

Turley looked at her without really seeing her.

"Ah don' cyar what you-all do," he muttered. "Ah'm through with you-all, now this has come on me."

"Don't you be such a fool as to let that gal out of here," said Nat, sharply. "She'll warn him."

"Warn him! Why should I warn him?" Juliet stared at him.

Nat shook his head stubbornly. "You look out for her," he said to Dan. "She's sweet on him."

She laughed again — with open scorn this time. "What cowards you both are!" she exclaimed. "You're both afraid to face him unless you can take him by surprise."

"He's took mah darter from me" said Dan Turley,

heavily. "If he don' wan' to marry her, he'll have to pay for it."

"Are you going to make him marry the girl at the point of a gun?" demanded Juliet, contemptuously. "Is that what you daughter wants, do you think?"

"She wants him," said the old man, with finality. "If she didn' wan' to marry him, she wouldn' have gone away, an' lef' that letter fo' me. Ah'm a-goin' to see as she gets what she wants." But he looked almost vacant as he spoke.

"Well," suggested Juliet, who contrived through all this to look entirely unconcerned, "she won't get what she wants if Mr. Mooney has his way as well. You can't marry a man and hang him too, you know."

In the bloodshot old eyes began to stir a vague trouble and bewilderment. He was grappling, grappling with something that puzzled and distressed him. He did not know what to do, nor what to think. Kitty wanted him to go and make Derry marry her; that much had been clear to him a second ago; what was this woman talking to him for — persistently, cruelly talking, trying to shake his blind determination to do what Kitty wished? He looked with a dull resentment toward Nat Mooney.

"That's so," he murmured. "You-all cyan't hang him, Nat; Kitty wants to marry him."

"Oh, say," said Nat, in disgust and wrath, "you're going nutty again, Dan. You were as sane as I am a minute ago. You know that skunk deserves to be hung, an' I'm going to see that he is. As for Kitty —"

"Yes, Nat," cried old Dan, eagerly, "there's Kitty! How about Kitty? There's huh honor, Nat —"

"She's got to take care of her own honor now!" said Nat, brutally. "I ain't got it to look out for no longer, I guess. An' it don't look like she'd been so awful tender of it, at that!"

Turley turned on him with clenched fists and a wild look.

Juliet thought for a moment that he was going to attack Mooney then and there.

"You-all kin take that back!" he cried "Mah gyurl don' need no one to defen' huh honor 'ceptin' me!"

"All right," said Nat. "Then let me get the boys and fix him. I reckon Kitty'll get over it."

And he gave an odd snarl as he spoke.

"I think," said Juliet, quickly, but how her heart beat, "that Mr. Mooney is quite right. If the man is as bad as you believe, he ought to die. Why, whatever the circumstances are, you oughtn't to want your daughter to marry him, to be tied to him for life! Why don't you keep out of it, Mr. Turley, and wait for your daughter to come back to you here, when — when it is all over?"

If only she could get Dan to give up his project of going to the Shutter! She would let Nat start out, and get his gang of ruffians together, his infamous lynching party, and lock Dan Turley up for the night in his own house. She was sure that she could do it; anyway, she could delay him for a good while. Then

she could get to the lower entrance of the Under Trail herself in time to put Derry on his guard before any possibility of the arrival of the lynching party. She felt that there was no danger of a real lynching; but that Derry would be roughly handled was very likely.

"Don't you pay no attention to her, Dan!" warned Nat Mooney. "She's tricky as they make 'em — didn't she knock you out last September? Don't you stay behind, anyhow. Didn't you say yourself that you'd shoot him?"

"If he didn't marry Kitty. Yes, Ah said Ah'd shoot him."

Before the look of pain and mental struggle on the lined face Nat swore huskily.

"Clean gone off his nut!" he growled. "Come on with me, Dan. We'll go an' see about it, anyhow."

Juliet could see that Dan Turley was slipping, slipping into the bottomless sea of madness. He was clinging pitifully to the few things that were yet sound and solid to him, but he was going fast. If she could have him in her hands for fifteen minutes, she could, with her knowledge of failing minds, make him utterly give up his journey of revenge. It was a fight between Nat Mooney and herself, and she knew that the odds were all against her.

"See here!" she said coolly, facing the man whose life she had once fought for. "Aren't you taking rather long chances, to engineer a lawless affair of

this sort, while Mr. Evarts is still looking for you to arrest you?"

"He's dropped that," said Nat, as coolly as herself.

"It wouldn't stay dropped very long if he heard about this sort of thing! You know it's Mr. Evarts' desire to get this whole neighborhood to be lawkeeping and prosperous. A crazy thing of the kind that you're starting on to-night would get a lot of people into trouble."

"Look here, ma'am," said Nat Mooney, and, to her surprise, he did not this time speak insolently. "This here's my affair. It's my business. Every feller's got one thing in his life that's his business an' no one else's; this is mine. If Mr. Evarts ain't got sense enough to see it that way — if he ain't man enough to see it that way — why, I've just got to take my chances. Now, ma'am, you've kept us back just about long enough. I know, an' half the boys know, that you're sweet on Derry Blake. Well, this is the time you ain't goin' to do any funny business on the side, and keep him from what's comin' to him. Will you stay here quietly, and let Dan an' me atten' to this our own way without makin' no fuss?"

"I certainly will not!" returned Juliet, white with anger.

"All right!" said Nat, calmly.

They stood facing each other. Juliet, with a high color and a light in her eyes, walked toward the door. She heard Nat say "Just as you like," without expression, and was off her guard. So that it was an

entire surprise, for which she was not braced, when she found herself seized from behind, her arms swiftly and not too gently tied across her back, and flung into a chair.

She was a prisoner!

It had happened so swiftly that she was still dazed, as she lay, rather than sat there, and stared up at him with horrified eyes.

As she saw the sneer on the man's mouth, her horror changed to a devouring rage.

Dan Turley was looking stupidly on. He grinned faintly, as though he knew that he ought to be pleased by her subjection, but he was clearly growing more and more confused. It would be remarkable if the last thread of reason did not snap entirely before long.

Neither of the men made any comment, as she lay there panting in the chair. Nat shrugged his shoulders, as though to indicate that for the time being, at least, she was disposed of, and then turned to talk in an inaudible tone to the old man. The latter listened docilely, but without much understanding. He was sinking every moment deeper into the marsh of his bewilderment. Only when Kitty's name was mentioned did he show any light of intelligence.

"All right," Juliet heard him say, in a dull sort of way, as though he were blindly obeying a command which he did not clearly comprehend. "Ah'll walk along the road — an' wait fo' you-all. How long you reckon yo'll be, eh?" He looked at Nat anxiously.

"I'll be about an hour, gettin' the boys together," said Nat. "Say, will you see that she's locked in, eh? Can you be trusted that fer, I wonder?"

"Mr. Turley!" cried Juliet, eagerly.

"Cyan' yo' keep still?" shouted old Dan, in sudden tremulous rage, that died as suddenly. "Ah don' feel mahself, Nat!" he muttered piteously. "Ah reckon Ah wan' Kitty. Where is Kitty?"

Nat was already out of the door. He shouted back: "Come on, Dan! I don't dare to leave you alone with her — she might get you to let her go!"

"We ain' got no hawses," objected Dan, with a brief gleam of clarity. He peered timidly into the darkness.

"Yours is ready in the shed," cried Nat. "And I," — he laughed roughly, — "I'll take *hers*."

"Mr. Turley!" pleaded Juliet, again, trying to attract his attention. He did not appear to hear her, but, muttering to himself, went slowly out of the house, and shut and locked the door. Juliet heard the sound of trampling hoofs in the shed outside; then, listening anxiously, she caught the echo of two horses going off down the trail. They had taken the mare as well as Turley's horse, and left her tied up there for God knew how long! She was more helpless than she had ever been in any situation before in all her life.

For a moment utterly despairing and disheartened, she sank back in the chair and closed her eyes. Then she pulled herself together again, and sat up, thinking hard. She looked at the clock ticking in the silence

from the shelf. Half past seven! And she had an hour. That was what Nat had said. An hour!

An hour in which to get free from these ropes that tied her, and get out of this lonely, locked house, and make her way on foot to the Under Trail! There was no use in screaming; no one could possibly be near enough to hear, and she would only waste her strength. It must all be done in an hour!

She glanced in conjecture and dismay! She looked at the lamp. Could she burn the ropes through against the hot glass? Or could she manage to light matches and do it that way? And even if she did get her hands free, could she ever succeed in climbing up to the high-set windows? There was no piece of furniture in the room tall enough to reach those windows, and even if she should get as far as one of the altitudinous sills, how could she ever get down to the ground on the other side? But there might be trees — and, anyway, she must try. She must burn the ropes sufficiently to get her hands free, and then she must move the chest of drawers and get one of the huge chairs on to the top of it. Could she possibly do it?

But she had lost seven minutes now, and Derry was in danger! In a panic of haste and determination she set to work She did not stop to look at the clock again as she backed against the table, and groped with her pinioned hands for the matches. It was with her feverish heartbeats, and with the pulse of pain in her burned wrists, that she counted the time.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN TIME

> ". . . Doth she not drag her feet
> A little as she walks? — slow — but how chaste! . . .
> Hath she the way of it? All the sweet wiles?
> The love that shall not weary must be art. . . .
> And are her eyes dark; dark, yet with lightning?
> Never a blue eye held a man like thee!" . . . .
>
> STEPHEN PHILLIPS.

IN the still heart of the mountain a man and a girl were talking that night in the light of one wavering candle stuck on a ledge of rock.

"Kitty," the man said gently, "what's the use? We've kind of played at love, we two, but it's never been the real thing, never gone anyways deep. You know that, kid?"

"I don't!" said Kitty. "I don't know anything of the kind! I've cared for *you*, all right!"

She was sitting hunched up on the floor of the cavernous space, which was one of a hundred rock chambers in the Under Trail. There was no wrap about her; there was nothing, as usual, on her head, and her hair was disordered. But she was beautiful. Haggard and somewhat forlorn as she crouched there, she was beautiful. Derry, standing with folded arms and watching her, was forced to acknowledge to him-

self the fact of her beauty, though it was a beauty which now left him cold.

"I tell you," she repeated defiantly, "I care for you!"

"Ah — don't!" he said, and frowned.

Kitty smiled a twisted smile.

"Don't care for you?" she demanded.

"No. At least, don't do that, either, of course. But — don't talk like that."

She relapsed into her sullen mood once more.

"It's true," she said.

Derry shook his head. "I'll not believe it, Kitty."

"You don't want to believe it!" she flashed.

"Hush, you silly child! I tell you, I don't believe it. *And* I wouldn't want to, anyhow. You've flirted a right lot with me, but so you have with plenty of other fellows — and no harm done!" He smiled at her with entire friendliness. "There's nothing between you and me, Kitten — nothing *big*."

"Nothing big!" she repeated, low and angrily. "Nothing like the feeling you and your precious nurse have for each other!"

His face flushed, and at the same time hardened. A curious look, distant and displeased, came into his eyes.

"I'd rather," he said, "that you didn't talk about her."

Kitty flung open her arms with a queer, wild motion. She lifted her dark eyes, big and tragic, to his face.

"That's it!" she moaned. "You see — that's it!

You can't bear even to have me speak of her. And yet — I love you a sight more than she does."

"Kitty!"

"I won't stop! I tell you, I do love you more. Girls like me can love more than any — *good* woman, as they call themselves — because we don't care about anything on earth except our love. We haven't any high moral nonsense to live up to; we just love."

She stopped, panting.

"Kitty," said Derry, quietly, in quite a matter-of-fact tone, "I reckon you don't mean a quarter of what you say; but even at that you know I don't like to listen to it. Come, kid, won't you part friends? We've liked each other —"

He paused, with a softened look.

"We've loved each other!" she cried.

"No, Kitten; never."

"I love you," said Kitty, flatly. "And you used to — love me!"

"No," he said gently. And he shook his head. "I don't reckon that I ever loved you, Kitty girl. But — you're a right sweet kitten when you like to be."

For the life of him Derry Blake could not have kept that caressing inflection out of his voice.

Kitty bent forward, vivified by a gleam of hope.

"Derry," she whispered passionately, "you'll not send me back? You'll let me stay with you?"

"Why, of course I won't let you stay, Kitty!" he exclaimed vigorously, matter-of-fact enough at

this suggestion. "You're out of your head, my dear girl, to think of such a thing for a moment. Say good-by, like a good little woman, and go home."

Kitty had begun to get slowly upon her feet. There was a soft and dangerous glint in her eye.

"Will you kiss me good-by?" she said.

Derry laughed outright, and shook his head. "Not if I know it!" he said. "I'll pay you that compliment, my dear; I wouldn't dare!"

Kitty paused upon her knees and looked up at him. Then she dropped her arms at her sides with a gesture of finality.

"I can't go back, anyhow," she said.

"Don't be silly! You can, and you will. In fact, you're going right now!"

"I can't go home," she said once more, with the queer little triumphant glance that was so characteristic of certain moods of hers.

"Kitty!" he exclaimed, eyeing her suspiciously. "What deviltry have you been up to now?" For he knew her pretty well!

Kneeling there in the flickering candle light, Kitty spoke.

"I left a note for dad," she said. "I told him that I had come to you."

"The devil you did!" Derry stared at her. "What did you do that for?"

"I wanted to settle it," said she.

"Settle it! Settle what?"

"I wanted you to have to — take me."

He shook his head hopelessly.

"Kitten, you're crazy, or I am! Speak up! What did you say in your note to your father?"

"I told him," said Kitty, "that things had gone too far—that it was too late—that you'd treated me badly—that I was going to marry you, or—kill you. That's all."

There was a silence.

"You little fiend!" said the man, at last. He was quite white, and seemed bewildered. "'That's all!' Yes, that's quite all, I should say! You little fiend!"

Suddenly, as she said nothing, he laughed—a furious, low laugh.

"And how long," he said, "do you calculate it will take your father to get here with a gun?"

"He won't shoot you, you see," said Kitty, without agitation, "unless I tell him you've refused to marry me."

"I see." Derry regarded her. "Well, you'd better go and get into a safe place, because there's liable to be some tall shooting round here before long."

"Then you do refuse?" she cried.

"Oh, I refuse all right," he said contemptuously. "I wouldn't marry you now to save myself from the stake, much less a fighting chance with a gun!" The usually slanting eyebrows were level and black.

"Derry, would it be such an awful thing to marry me?"

"I think," he said mercilessly, "that to marry a girl like you, who's lied about me, and tricked me,

and tried her best to saddle me with one of the few rotten acts I've never happened to commit, would be about the most awful thing going! No, thanks, I'll go to hell by some quicker and straighter road than that!"

"Well, you'll find it!" cried Kitty, rather wildly. "You'll find it sooner than you think!"

Derry turned all at once, for his quick ears, used to the echoes of the underworld, had heard something.

"What's that?" he exclaimed sharply.

The subterranean passages were suddenly full of footsteps, coming nearer and nearer to them, echoing from every side.

"Dad!" declared Kitty, with a thrill in her voice.

"Rot!" said her companion. "If that's your father, he's got a regiment with him!"

Then Kitty herself blanched with apprehension, for there was no question about it — there were many men instead of one coming to them along the rocky ways of the Under Trail.

"It's a gang!" muttered Derry. He turned on Kitty with a scornful smile on his white lips. "More of your work?"

"No!" she gasped, with absolute sincerity and anguish. "I swear — I swear — I don't know what it means!"

"Don't swear anything!" he said. "I wouldn't believe you, anyway!"

"Derry! You don't think I'd trap you like this?"

"I think you *have* trapped me — lying about me to your father, and —"

"Derry, you'll have to forgive me for that — oh, you must, you must! It was the only way I could think of! I thought I could get you that way, and I loved you!"

He laughed. "Loved me!"

"You're brutal!" she moaned.

"I reckon I am." He drew a long breath. "And I don't think I ever wanted to be right down brutal to a woman before. But trapped like a rat in a hole like this —" He had caught up his rifle.

Suddenly Kitty raised her hand. "I don't understand!" she exclaimed under her breath. "Listen! There are more steps —"

Derry listened, too.

"From the opposite direction!" he declared, wondering.

"Who on earth —" muttered Kitty.

The single footsteps became clearer, more hurried. The multiple tread still approached gradually.

"Look out! Some one just behind you!" cried Kitty, in a frightened but guarded tone,

Derry wheeled, and — Juliet, panting and exhausted, caught at his arm to steady herself.

"Am I in time?" she gasped. "The others haven't gotten here yet?"

Kitty was looking at her as though she were an apparition. Indeed, with her hair loosened and floating in a nimbus about her death-white face, she

looked less like a human woman than a spirit or a dream.

"You're all right!" said Derry, smiling at her reassuringly, and supporting her with a strong arm about her shoulders. "It's all right!"

Love, faith, gratitude, protection, a hundred little half-tones of understanding vibrated in his voice. And she clung to him.

As she did so, he caught sight of her wrists deeply marked with raw red burns, freshly made.

"Good Heavens! What have you done to yourself?" he exclaimed in a white flame of horror at the sight. She hid her hands, and shook her head. Not now — she could not tell him about it now! She was tense with listening.

"Hark!" cried Kitty, lifting her hands, for all at once, the other, multiple steps were upon them.

They saw old Dan's face, troubled and startled, staring at them. The next moment Nat Mooney and his friends poured into the rock chamber where they stood.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MADNESS OF DAN TURLEY

"This passion lifted him upon his feet,
And made his hands to struggle in the air,
His Druid locks to shake and ooze with sweat,
His eyes to fever out, his voice to cease. . . ."

JOHN KEATS.

THEY pushed past old Dan, and surged forward — the fierce, stupid faces and menacing sticks showing like visions in a nightmare. Kitty screamed, and covered her eyes with her hands.

"What's the trouble, boys?" said Derry, easily. He had drawn his arm from Juliet's shoulder, and was facing them with nonchalant surprise.

"You hound!" shouted Nat Mooney, advancing upon him. "You've done as you liked long enough; you've played your game of 'Gentleman Derry,' as the boys used to call you, *long enough!* You can't go on with that high-handed business and go scot-free!" Nat was raving in a rage of long-pent-up jealousy and resentment. "It was always you!" he went wildly on. "*Your* way with the women, an' *your* quickness with a gun, an' *your* luck at cards, and — *always you!* An' I'm sick of it! I'm sick of it, I tell you, an' yer 'gentleman's ways'! Steal my girl, would you? Take her away from me under my

nose, when I'd won her back — when," cried Nat, "I thought I'd won her back —"

"You're in wrong, Nat," said Derry, directly, and without anger. "I haven't stolen your girl, and I haven't done you a single bad turn — unless you count that hole in you" — he grinned — "and what's a little matter like that between gentlemen?"

"I ain't a gentleman!" stormed Nat, "nor I don't lay claim to be! You've acted like a dirty sneak, an' we've come to see you pay for it. The boys won't stand for actions like that," blustered Nat.

Then old Dan advanced, unsteady and suddenly infirm. He raised one great, shaking hand, and began to curse Derry horridly. The phrases rolled with a dreadful solemnity from his lips, and even the listening men, hardened to blasphemy, shuddered to hear him. His invective was broken in upon unexpectedly by a clear voice.

"Why, it's Mr. Turley!" said Juliet, coming forward out of the shadows. "I didn't tell you, Mr. Turley, but your daughter and I had agreed to come down here to see — Mr. Blake. He — he's been showing us the cave and the underground trails."

Dan and Nat stared at her as though she were a ghost risen from the grave. There was a long minute of silence. Then one of the men laughed.

"Don't look like an abduction exactly, Dan!" he remarked.

"They didn't fergit the chapy-rone, anyhow!" chuckled a second.

Out of the ripple of derision that spread through that impromptu "lynching party," primed for tragedy and punishment, another of them spoke up: "What does the girl say?"

Kitty was white and shaking. She hesitated just a second, as she looked from Derry to Juliet, and then let her glance stray terror-stricken to Nat and the other men.

"Dad has — made a — mistake!" she faltered. "There's nothing wrong — nothing! It's just as she said."

Nat stood motionless, with a dropped jaw, looking at her. The old man's face was working horribly. For the first time in his life he faced his daughter in a fury of revolt.

"An' yo'r letter?" he cried. "That letter you-all writ me?"

"What letter?" said Kitty, trying to bluff it out, though she cast a frightened glance at Derry. "What letter, Dad?"

"That letter," shouted her father, wildly, and the true, strange glow of mania was in his eyes at last; "that letter — that — you-all writ me — about him!" he choked and clutched at the air. "The letter," he gasped, "that proves what we come hyar fo'!"

"There isn't any letter," said Juliet, calmly. "If you mean that silly note that was in your house, it was just a — joke."

"Where is it?" he demanded, his voice rising to a scream.

Kitty, terrified by the sudden breakdown, knelt at his side — *Page* 351.

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"Where is it?" repeated Nat, in a strained tone.

"I did not think it was worth keeping," said Juliet, smiling at him, "so I tore it up!"

A little thing will demolish a rotten dam, and the pent-up waters broke then. The rock chamber was a place of chaos, filled with the fury of Dan Turley's delirium. The tight rein which he had been keeping upon himself all that evening had now snapped, and he raved horribly but insanely, and tried over and over again to get at Derry. Three of the men held him, and Kitty, terrified by the sudden breakdown, knelt at his side, trying to cling to him as he fought and struggled.

Nat stood by passively — stunned, one might say, by some deep reaction of feeling.

Once he looked at Derry in a dull sort of way.

"Mebbe — what she said — ain't true?" he said.

"No, Nat," said Derry, meeting his eyes squarely. "It isn't true."

Nat nodded twice, very slowly, and relapsed into his abstracted, apathetic silence.

"See here!" broke in one of the men. "If you're Derry Blake, ain't you wanted by Ted Kipley and the other boys, over to Carkham?"

"I reckon I am," said Derry, calmly, "This is the chap I plugged right here. Go ahead, and lodge your complaint, Nat!"

"I guess," said Nat, slowly, "I don't want to lodge no complaint."

"Oh, go on, and make your charge!" urged Derry. "I'll come peaceful, see if I don't!"

"No," said Nat, in the same dull way, "I guess I don't want to. I guess," he put his hand up to his forehead, and rubbed away the perspiration in a preoccupied fashion. "I guess—I don't want to do much of anything—any more."

He shuffled off by himself, and they heard his heavy, dragging step going farther and farther away along the rock passages of the Under Trail.

"Say," said one of the men in an astonished undertone, "he's all broke up!"

"Ain't the man he was," muttered another. "I think the gal's treated him rotten bad, if you ask me!"

He looked accusingly at Kitty as he spoke, but she paid no attention. She was still kneeling beside her father, talking to him tenderly. The old man was quieter now, but the light of insanity was fixed forever in his eyes. He babbled and muttered to himself, and was mercifully unconscious of his whereabouts, as of the curious eyes that watched him.

Juliet went over to the tragic little group, and laid her hand on Kitty's shoulder. The girl looked up with startled eyes, but for the first time there was no resentment in her gaze as it met that of the nurse.

"Do you reckon," she asked pitifully, "that he's gone clean crazy for keeps, Miss Gray?"

"Why, I hope not," said Juliet, gently. "He's been under a great strain to-night, you know and—"

"It's my fault," said Kitty. "I reckon it's all my fault!"

"Don't you think," Juliet ventured, "that he should be taken care of? Somewhere, you know, where he can have doctors, and —"

Kitty sprang upright with an affrighted look, and an outstretched arm, as though to shield her father.

"Oh, don't let them take him away!" she prayed in terror. "Let me try to take care of him myself! Oh, let me! Let me! I'll never do anything else in my whole life, if you'll let me do that. He's all I have now. He's all I have!"

She broke down then, and for the first time since that night when they helped to get Derry away, she burst out sobbing.

"We'll see how he is to-morrow," said Juliet, compassionately. "He should go home now."

She looked inquiringly toward the men who had been holding Dan; they muttered that they would see to him.

"And I'll go with you," Juliet said, as a matter of course. "I am a nurse."

Derry picked up his gun and slouch hat without a word, and went, too. And so the grim little procession made its way back through the Under Trail.

"How did you hurt your hands?" was the first thing Derry said to Juliet, as they walked through the dark and echoing passageways.

"Oh," she was confused and troubled by the question; "they tied me up —"

"Tied you up! Where?"

"In Dan Turley's cottage."

"What were you doing there?" he demanded in astonishment.

She colored faintly. "I had lost my way. I stopped there to ask directions."

"Lost your way!"

"I was — I was looking for a short cut to — the Shutter!"

"You were coming to me, after all!" He turned, and met her eyes in the lantern-rayed darkness.

She hurried on: "I read Kitty's note. And they were afraid I would warn you."

"You were coming to me!" he repeated. Then: "They didn't *hurt* you?"

"Just tied me up with ropes and things!" She smiled feebly.

"And how did you get away? Tell me about your hands, dear."

"I got some matches and burned the ropes through. That's all."

He smothered an exclamation, and, unseen by any one else, he took one hand gently in his, and touched his lips to the red scar.

"For me!" he whispered.

"For myself," she answered with a gentle look.

"Because of me!" he said.

"It's the same thing!" declared Juliet, softly. "It doesn't hurt now, you know — much."

And they walked on in silence.

They all went together to the Turley house. Dan was exhausted by this time, and was quite willing to go to bed quietly. Kitty sat by his bedside, looking years older in an hour. She accepted Juliet's help and comfort quite unresponsively, as though it were a matter that concerned her not at all. Derry had left them at the door of the house, and no one referred to him.

It was another hour still before the nurse felt that all was well for the time being, and that she could safely leave Kitty and her tragic charge. To her surprise, just as she was going, Kitty looked up with dark rings around her eyes and said: "Get one of the boys to find Nat."

"You want him?"

"Yes. I'm afraid, sitting here by myself. No!" as Juliet started to speak. "I don't want you. I don't want any one in particular, except — except — I reckon I'd like to have Nat around."

"I'll see if one of them can find him." Juliet turned to the door.

"See here!" said Kitty, suddenly. "If I keep him here, will you take advantage of it to send over to-morrow and arrest him?"

"Nat Mooney?"

"Yes. I suppose you could arrest him on a couple of charges, if you'd a mind to." Something of the old resentment sounded in Kitty's voice.

Juliet shook her head.

"No," she said quietly. "I don't want to arrest him particularly."

Kitty's sharp, dark eyes slipped to the other girl's wrists.

"Did dad or he — do that?" she asked.

"No," said Juliet. "I did it myself getting away."

"I didn't know," said Kitty. "I've known dad to do some — some funny things like that when he got mad."

Juliet shuddered. They looked down together upon the lined and aged face. The wickedness of it had been smoothed out by sleep — or was it the veils of madness that had fallen before it, hiding the marks of the man's dark life, and leaving only his pitiful great age and weakness for the eyes to rest upon?

"I reckon," said Kitty, "he's my job after this. You'll let me keep him — for a while — and take care of him?"

"I have nothing to do with it," Juliet reminded her. "I suppose, if he is not violent, you will be allowed to care for him yourself, if you choose to. It will be a terrible task."

"I'm through with everything else pretty much," said Kitty. "As for Derry —"

She hesitated; then went dreamily on: "I certainly was fond of Derry. I'd have taken about all the chances there are to — get him. I reckon I did take a good many, for that matter. But somehow all that seems mighty far away now. And Derry never set much store by me — excepting to flirt with. You'll find he'll do *that* all his life! See here, you *aren't* going to arrest Nat for what he did to you?"

"No. I think he's been punished enough," said Juliet. "He loves you, and you've been unkind to him. And I don't think he'll do much harm to any one after this. You've broken him, Kitty." It was the first time she had ever called the girl by her first name.

"Nat," said Kitty, with one of her quaint flashes of instinctive wisdom, "is a mighty bad man, but a right true dog."

"I'll try to have him found for you," said Juliet, simply.

She was at the door when Kitty called to her: —

"I just want to tell you before you go — I've hated you, and I've wanted to kill you — tried to kill you more than once, as you know. Well — I want to say — that I think you're the finest sport I ever knew. Good night."

CHAPTER XXXIV

"GOOD-BY!"

"O very woman, god at once and child! . . .
The shadow of death, informed with shows of strife,
Was, ere I won thee, all I had of life.
Light war, light love, light living, dreams in sleep. . . ."

". . . Hand from hand
For the last time fell separate, eyes of eyes
Took for the last time leave, and saw the skies
Dark with their deep division. The last time. . . ."

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

As she left the Turley house she saw, to her amazement, Nat Mooney skulking in the underbrush at the side of the house. His eyes were fixed hungrily upon the light that streamed out from the room where Kitty sat watching over her father.

"A right true dog!" thought Juliet, recalling what Kitty had said of him. He shrank out of the light, as she came in sight, but she stopped short, and called him softly: —

"Nat Mooney!"

After a second, he came sullenly out from the shadows, but he did not look at her.

"She wants you," said Juliet, and walked on.

"Say," called Nat after her, and there was a

shamed note in his voice, "your horse is tied to a tree out there."

"Thanks!" said Juliet, smiling a little in the darkness.

But she was so weary and so despondent, that she could hardly hold her head up, as she untied the mare, and prepared for her ride back to Evartston. She felt that she had lived a long, long lifetime since she left it. Time had a way of losing all its wonted measure on Liberty Ridge.

Her hand was on the pommel, preparatory to mounting, when Derry's voice close to her said: "Wait a minute, dear."

The little word, intimate and tender, brought a rush of tears to her tired eyes. Yielding to an impulse, she allowed herself to lean against him for just a moment, under cover of the darkness — then drew away swiftly, shocked by her own weakness.

"I mustn't — you mustn't!" she whispered, with a catch in her breath. "Let me go now!"

He was silent for a short space; then he burst out: "See here! You know I am not a fine sort of person, nor high-minded, nor anything like that. I'm just a man — a common, ordinary, everyday man; but I've lived straight and clean in my way — in spite of being a blackguard sometimes! I don't know how to put what I've got to say, but — I *feel* it right enough, and I know it's *right!* You are going to marry that fellow Evarts, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"In spite of loving me?"

"You have no right —" she was beginning desperately, but he cut in: —

"Yes, I have the right. I'll say it again, too. You might as well hear it, as long as it's true. You love me, but in spite of loving me you're going to marry another man. Isn't that so?"

"I'm going to marry Mr. Evarts — yes!" she returned almost sternly.

"And you think that's right? You think that's decent?"

The light from the Turleys' cabin streamed full on her face. It was quivering with pain.

"Don't you see," she pleaded, "there's so much in life, besides — just — love!"

"'Besides just love!' 'Just love!' Yes? Go on!"

"There's faithfulness, and kindness, and patience," said Juliet. "There's making people happy in good, gentle ways —"

"And being miserably unhappy yourself!" he broke in.

"No; I shan't be unhappy — not truly unhappy. I shall be happy in the best way."

"Oh, will you?"

"Yes," said she, bravely, "I shall be happy in doing what I know is right."

"Oh, you dear, plucky, beautiful thing!" he almost groaned. "You're so wise and so sweet and so true — and such a baby! Listen to me: Do you really

think, on the level, that you can be half so much of a woman without love as you can with it?"

"I don't think anything about it," she said steadily, though her lips trembled. "I know I've given my word to Craig Evarts."

"And what are you going to do," he persisted ruthlessly, "when you miss me? You're bound to miss me. You've only seen me four times, but you'll miss me every hour of your life, as I shall miss you. What shall you do, when you think of me, and when you dream — and you will dream — of what your life would have been — long, good years, spent with some one who loved you better than anything in the world, and whom you loved the same — someone that the sight of, and the presence of, and the — touch — of would have made you joy. — Yes! I tell you I'm talking straight truth to you now! What will you do when you begin to make pictures in your head out of what might have been?"

"Stop!" she said sharply. "You shall not say those things to me! I've given my word and, — I'm going to keep it."

He regarded her with a sort of tender rage.

"There's nothing to do with you," he said. "You'll marry him whatever happens, whether or no — if I let you!"

"If you let me!"

"Yes; it's up to me, I see. Well, I bet you I save you in spite of yourself! You dearest and most wrong-headed woman in the world, will you let me kiss you — once — for good-by?"

She leaned toward him silently, choking back her tears; and for a long, long minute the world was blotted out, and there was neither time nor place.

"Good-by!" said Juliet, faintly.

And he released her, and put her up into the saddle. He did not speak at all.

When she looked back, he was still standing, bareheaded, in the patch of light. Then she could not see him for her tears, and, turning away, she rode home through the night.

A sort of misty drizzle was in the air, a sense of tears, she said to herself, as she rode down the trail. Everything about her was touched with the same chill heaviness, as though the last warmth and blitheness of the earth had departed for all time.

As she approached Mack's cottage, she saw that he was standing at the door.

She was obliged to ride slowly, just there, and he recognized her perforce.

"Miss Gray!" he exclaimed, scowling. "They're fair daft about ye over at the big house!"

"Oh, I am sorry they were anxious," Juliet said, pulling up the mare. "Did Mr. Evarts telephone?"

"I'm thinkin' he'll hev been telephonin' ivery place on the Ridge," rapped out the Scotchman. He regarded her with something of his old suspicion. "It seems, mem, that ye did not set their minds at rest aboot yer comin'!"

"It was a very sudden decision," said Juliet, hurriedly. She was feeling sick and weary. All this

seemed so ignoble and futile somehow! She had said good-by to Derry, and she was going back to take up her duty again. What irony it was that she should be met by this swarm of trivial annoyances! She was only just learning that Life will not allow us to do anything in the grand style. We may not bear ourselves in any of our tragedies nor dramas with the dignity and the fitness that we would like. We pass from deathbeds to dinner, and have to explain away the elements in our greatest renunciations.

"I told Meester Evarts, mem," said Mackanerny, "that the lads had told me of seein' ye walkin' with Derry Blake an' the Turley pair, like old friends."

"Oh, did you?" said Juliet, looking at him. "That was very nice of you! I suppose then that they are not so anxious as they were?"

"I'm thinkin'," said Mack, "that Meester Evarts was not understandin' why ye were there at all." He added, reluctantly and sourly: "'Twas my duty to tell him, mem."

"Certainly," said Juliet, pleasantly. "Suppose you telephone him now that I am on my way home. Good night!"

Mack went into the house, and she rode on.

On the way home she let herself think for the last time of what Liberty Ridge had meant to her. She had found such strange, new, wonderful things here — such strength, such freedom of heart. She knew that, though it was here she had met her deepest and most everlasting sorrow in the loss of Derry, it was

here, too, that she had found herself. Dimly, as she rode in the faint chill drizzle, she marveled at the why and wherefore of it. Derry had said once that if this — their meeting and loving — had meant nothing, there was no sense in anything in the world. Somehow, in this minute, she knew that he was wrong. Not what we *do*, but what we *are*, counts in the sum of things. Not our pain nor our joy is important to ourselves, but our capacity for the one and the other.

She found Evartston still fluttered over her disappearance. Her brief explanation that old Turley had had a bad attack, and that she had been with him and his daughter, doing what she could, satisfied Aunt Alicia and Louise; but Craig still appeared ill at ease.

Just as she was starting wearily to go to her room, he stopped her.

"Juliet, I — I don't altogether like your flying over the hills like this!" he said, somewhat awkwardly. "It — well, to tell you the truth, it doesn't look well. And the men talk."

She raised her head with a flash of spirit to answer him, but she was too weary for argument. Besides, she felt vaguely but poignantly that she was in the wrong, and Craig in the right.

"Very well," she said tonelessly. "I shan't ever want to go there again, anyway."

Evarts hesitated a moment, fidgeting with the leather fringe of a mantel scarf. At last he burst out: —

"Hang it all, Juliet — I might as well be frank with you! That rotten tramp, Mooney, came to me once, with a cock-and-bull story about your having had some sort of love affair with the fellow Blake. Of course," added Evarts, hastily and sincerely, "I just kicked him out, for a lying, low-minded brute! But he's a noisome worm. He may have talked to others who — who wouldn't know what a liar he was. When I turned on him about it, he said so many stupid things about *my* being afraid of his killing me, and *your* being afraid of his talking about you, that — that —well," finished Evarts, rather shamefacedly, "that was really why I didn't push the assault charge against him, you know. Just a sporting proposition. I didn't want us to seem intimidated."

"I see." Juliet was thoughtful. Evarts was astonished that she took it so quietly, but in reality she was merely thinking of Mooney, and his reptile faculty for stinging. Well, poor serpent, his fangs were drawn now. "He has always hated me," she went on, simply enough. "I'm sorry, though, that you should have been troubled about it, Craig."

"Why, good Lord, Juliet!" the young man exclaimed indignantly. "You don't think a beast like that could really trouble me, do you? I wouldn't insult you by even wondering how he got such a notion. All I meant was —" he paused; then he said, coloring with quite a boyish shyness: "Are you very keen to wait till spring for our wedding, Juliet?"

"No," she returned. If there had been lurking at

the back of her brain any last hope of breaking her engagement at the eleventh hour, it had died now, killed by Craig's magnanimity and trust. "When do you want to have it?"

"I thought," ventured Evarts, "that — you like this place so much — and Aunt Alicia was speaking of it to-day — and then no one could ever say a word, you know. Why couldn't we be married here — before Christmas?"

Juliet's heart seemed to stop. So soon!

But she recovered herself, and answered gently:

"Let it be here then, Craig — and before Christmas, if you like."

CHAPTER XXXV

JULIET'S WEDDING EVE

"And far across the hills they went
In that new world which is the old;
. . . . . .
And o'er the hills, and far away,
Beyond the utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Through all the world she follow'd him."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

JULIET'S wedding day was set for the nineteenth of December. On the seventeenth it began to snow heavily, and when it cleared off on the morning of the eighteenth, the world was white and glistening under the sun.

"All nature looks bridal, my love!" said Aunt Alicia, sentimentally.

It was going to be a very small and simple wedding; they were all agreed upon that. Only the old Thanksgiving house party and one or two more of Craig's college friends had come. Juliet had no family connections close enough to invite, so the affair would be really and strictly quiet.

Juliet was very beautiful in these days, but though she smiled with a ready sweetness upon every one, she did not look like a happy bride. And sometimes Miss

Alicia, looking at her with her old, wise eyes, had misgiving.

But preparations went forward merrily, and on the eighteenth there was nothing left to do but wait twenty-four hours more for the wedding day itself.

Louise was entirely reconciled to the marriage now — partly, no doubt, because her own affair was going well. Oddly enough, it was Tommy himself who had won over the Evarts family. He was still anæmic, and still addicted to gambling and extravagance, but Craig had admitted that "he wasn't a bad little fellow, you know, if you didn't have to see too much of him." And Miss Evarts had decided that "Louise would be the better for any occupation — even that of looking out for that little whippersnapper."

So Louise was to be allowed to marry her Tommy, if not with her people's blessing, at least with their tolerant consent. Evarts had promised to settle something on her, and Miss Alicia agreed that she should have as much of her own money as "they all thought would be good for her." This moral and material support sufficiently cheered poor Louise — who had been sadly chastened by the voodoo experience — to make her quite nice and sisterly to Juliet.

Perhaps the most pathetic member of the wedding party — for Juliet was too brave to need any one's pity — was Molly Davidge. She had come down for the wedding, of course — what girl would miss the lamentable comfort of assisting at the interment of her own hopes? But she looked quite wistful, poor

child, and had grown noticeably thinner since Craig's wedding day had been set. She was not a bad sort, was little Molly, and it is a question if, in her infantile freshness and kittenishness, she was not better suited to Craig's temperament than the graver, larger-natured girl whom he was so shortly to make his wife.

"I think," Louise remarked privately to her aunt, "that if Juliet were struck by lightning, Craig would marry Molly Davidge to-morrow."

"Such a supposition," snorted Miss Evarts, "only shows your common blood!"

During the afternoon of the eighteenth came a rather startling telephone call from Doctor Clement.

Miss Gray was needed immediately on Liberty Ridge. Yes, Kitty Turley. She had hurt herself, trying to control her father, and must be seen to at once. No; Craig need not bring her himself. The doctor's man was at the hotel drug store just below Evartston, having some prescriptions made up. He would stop for Miss Gray. Very sorry, but nothing else to do. Good-by.

The doctor here rang off, and Evarts swore roundly that Juliet should not go one step.

Of course she said she would go. "It's a call to duty," she averred.

"Thank Heaven," said Evarts, "that it is the last call to that sort of duty that you will ever have! The last call to duty that you had, you stayed a week!"

Juliet smiled faintly, and went upstairs to put on her furs.

Miss Alicia, sitting in a rocking-chair, held forth forcibly on the question. "So like James Clement," said she, rocking violently, "to send for a woman professionally on her wedding eve! He's nothing but a medical degree incarnate, without a bit of humanity!"

By the time Juliet was ready, the doctor's sleigh was at the door. The driver, a fur cap pulled over his ears, touched the brim of it as she got in, but did not turn his face toward her.

"Warm enough?" cried Miss Alicia from the door.

"Quite!" Juliet smiled her good-bys.

"Tell Clement, with my compliments, that the next time I get married I'll see that it's not in his neighborhood!"

And Evarts, still grumbling, went back to where Molly Davidge was waiting eagerly for the boon of five minutes' chat with him.

The sleigh started off with much jingling. As Juliet turned to look at the driver more closely, she was surprised to see that he was Nat Mooney.

"Why, I didn't know you were driving for Doctor Clements!" she exclaimed.

"I do it sometimes," was Nat's only rejoinder.

He whipped up the rawboned horse, and they skimmed over the sunlit snow with the wind in their faces.

A wonderful day it was — ah, a divine day! But

Juliet Gray closed her eyes not to see so much brightness and beauty, so much splendor of white and blue and sapphire skies. Her heart was too sick to be touched by the beauties of nature. To-morrow was her wedding day.

Fighting off the despair that was shutting in so heavily upon her, she asked Nat some questions about Kitty's hurt. He answered stupidly, as though he did not know much about it.

Only once did he show any animation.

"Me and Kitty's goin' to be married come the New Year," he said. "She needs some one to help her with Dan."

And Juliet told him heartily and sincerely that she was glad to hear it.

Liberty Ridge was a place of beauty when they got to it — all silver and diamond ice, pearly snow and lace-like frost. The shadows on the snow were all the tones of shells and summer clouds. Such a fairy world — with the fresh, pure wind blowing over it, and the snow-filled valley lying so far below, like a dream!

To her surprise, Juliet found Kitty up and about. The doctor had been gone some time. Kitty had indeed bruised her shoulder, and the contusions would probably be improved by the compresses of cold water and alcohol that Juliet applied. But she was not in any way badly hurt, and Juliet felt more and more mystified as to the reason for the doctor's peremptory and inopportune summons of her.

Kitty was a very different creature from the Kitty of the past — gentler, less intense — even, in spite of her life of anxiety, less tragic. She spoke quietly and kindly of Nat, and seemed to have crushed down all her old fiery malice of spirit toward those who stood in the way of her desires. She had not reformed, she had simply altered.

"I still hate you," she explained to Juliet, quite calmly and easily, "but I'm going to do you a good turn yet — because I want to show you that I can be as good a sport as you. You are a right fine loser, and I like you for it — though you took — him — away from me. Do you want to see dad?"

When she spoke of her unfortunate father her voice became infinitely yearning and tender. Poor, sinful old Turley, after his years of blind adoration of his daughter, was reaping his reward in her present passionate devotion.

Juliet bowed her head without speaking, and went into the inner room. Dan was in a silent, vacant mood. He was weak that day, and had to be in bed, and he plucked at his bedclothes as he chattered to himself. He did not know her in the least, and Juliet was inconsequently glad that he could not know that she whom he detested and had once tried to kill was still well and safe.

"Good-by," said Kitty, when it was time for Juliet to go. "They tell me you are to be married tomorrow. Is that so?"

"Yes, it is so," said Juliet, looking at her with her

brave and sad blue eyes. "Will you wish me — contentment?"

"No!" said Kitty, quickly. "I will wish you — life! Life!" She flung her arms wide. "Go," she said, "to — your marriage."

Juliet was puzzled, for there was a solemn note in the rich voice.

She got into the sleigh, and when she turned to wave farewell, Kitty was still standing with outstretched arms. She gave to Juliet a fleeting, singular impression of a living cross.

Under the gold and sapphire of the clear December sky, the horse trotted fast and faster under stealthy urging. But it was not toward Evartston that he trotted, but toward the other trail and Battlebrook.

Suddenly Juliet realized the fact, and started up, puzzled and a little frightened.

"Why — why — where are we going?" she exclaimed, in a startled tone.

The bells jingled and jangled in wild merriment, as the big gray horse plunged forward under another flicker of the whip.

She turned to look at the man seated in the sleigh beside her. His coat collar was turned up, and the ear lappets of his cap turned down, but — she knew him!

Even as she gasped out a sudden cry, he brought his eager, handsome face close to hers. He was warmly flushed, and the dark brows slanted dangerously as he laughed into her eyes.

"I told you, dear, that I should save you in spite of yourself!" said Derry, and the horse dashed onward down the snow-packed trail. "I'm going to carry you away by force — and if you don't like it, you can spend the rest of your life telling me so!"

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